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may 2002

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EVERYONE
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

NAUGHTY DOG

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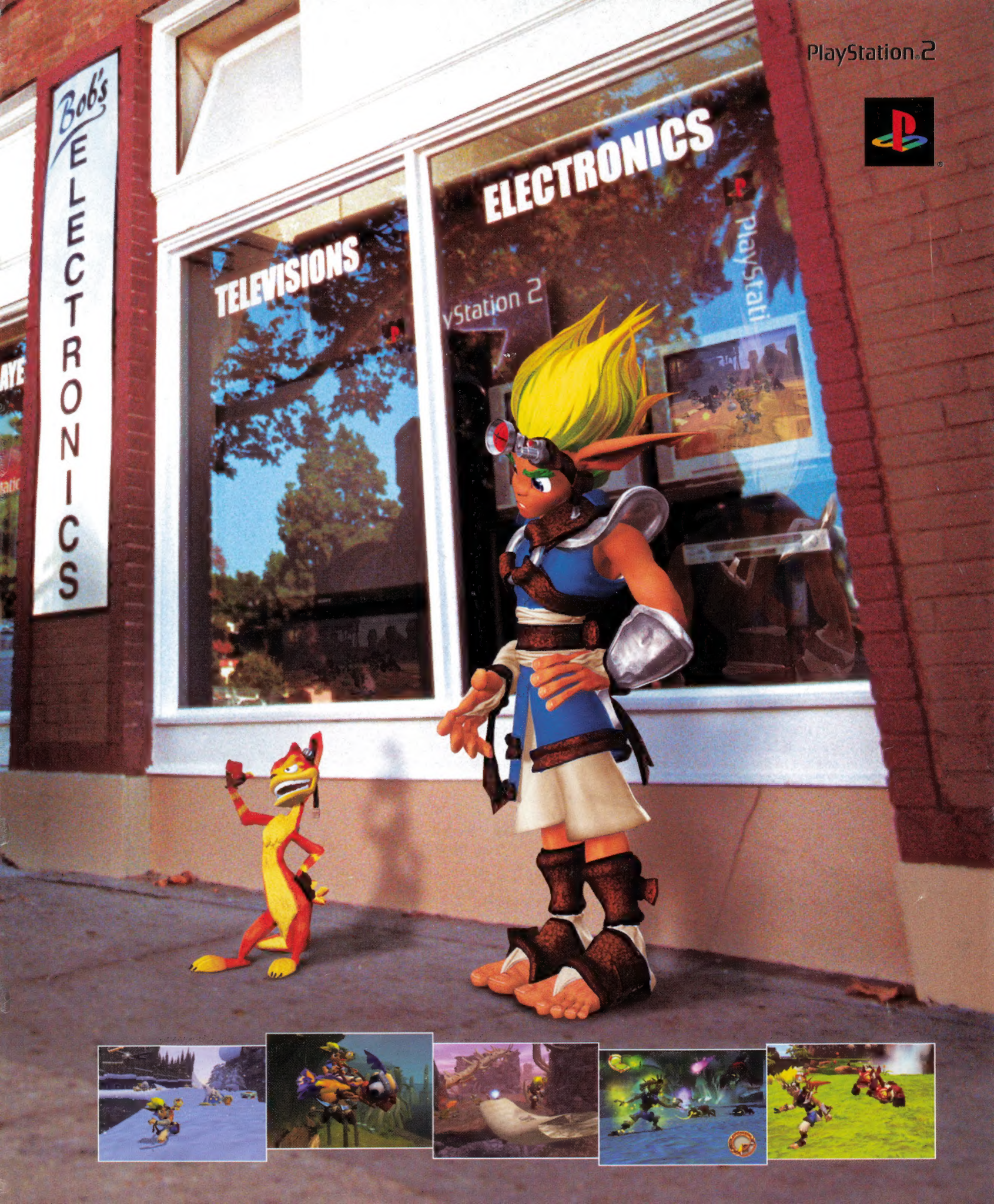
PlayStation.2
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play

vol. 1 issue 5

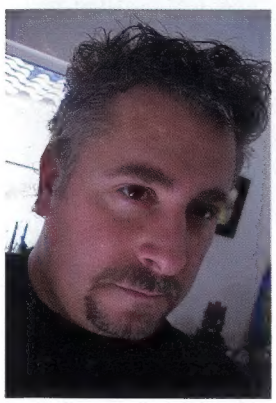
I LIKE IT HERE

With the Xbox heading into its second generation, it is exceedingly obvious what a few extra bells and whistles—and the ram to support them—can mean to a modern game console. Bump-mapping, for instance, affords lilmitless potential, adding a layer of depth and realism to characters and environments that I don't think anyone saw coming. Forget hi-resolution textures; now we want real surfaces. But just how long will all of this new granduer last? Will developers continue to unlock more and more of the system's potential as the console ages like they did with 16 and 32-bit machines? Or are its assets so easy to access that we're seeing it all right now in games like *Halo*, and the upcoming *Malice* and *Star Wars RPG*?

Personally, I still think a console should enjoy at least a five-year gestation period, enough time for series to blossom and to tap every last resource of the hardware—including the ability to lower the price-point as technology allows. In other words, I'd much rather have the quality of a perfected Xbox game than the experimental nature of an Xbox 2 game in 2004.

It seems like every time we ask "How much better can it get?" in this industry, it does just that—but it comes at price. With the PS2, GameCube and especially Xbox launches still fresh in our minds, it's a little unnerving to be reading news of the PS3, although Sony, through a partnership with IBM, is talking about redefining game architecture as we know it (**see Ink, pg.09**). An exciting proposition indeed, but can't we settle in with our newfound consoles before we start dreaming of the next wave? For all I know, the PS3 could be years off, but that seems doubtful as new technology doesn't have that long of a shelf life anymore. Based on *Jak and Daxter*, it seems like the PS2 has potential far beyond what we've seen so far—imagine, for instance, what Naughty Dog could do designing a game that actually loaded; and as for the GameCube, we're still digging through stacks of ports of games made for other systems at this point. Very few exclusive games that really tap its potential are available—only *Pikmin* and Soccer Slam come to mind. *Star Fox Adventures*, *Zelda*, *Mario Sunshine*, *Metroid Prime*, and *Bomberman Generations* will begin to show what the GameCube is really made of.

Maybe I'm just so thrilled to see the industry so healthy that I'm a little paranoid about changing gears again—or even the thought of it. From where I sit, there appears to be more great games coming out than anyone who sleeps will have time to keep up with, and that to someone who's been playing them for a a decade-and-a-half, is nothing short of a miracle.



"WITH THE PS2, GAMECUBE AND ESPECIALLY XBOX LAUNCHES STILL FRESH IN OUR MINDS, IT'S A LITTLE UNNERVING TO BE READING NEWS OF THE PS3."

DAVE HALVERSON, EDITOR IN CHIEF

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EIDOS INTERACTIVE

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We interview the talented team at Argonaut responsible for the Xbox's first mascot-driven platformer—and one incredible PS2 game. A more beautiful game, you have never seen.

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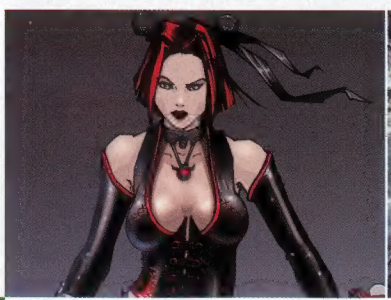
The fog is beginning to lift on Majesco's Nazi-sqaushng vampire queen, Bloodrayne.



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Once you recover from the most glorious opening animation sequences ever rendered—and one twisted music video—a grand sequel awaits that will take your breath away.

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The calm before the storm is drawing to a close as Nintendo prepares to unload both barrels.

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The Addams Family has nothing on the Prince of Evil and his cool clan—otherwise known as Sharon, Jack and Kelly .

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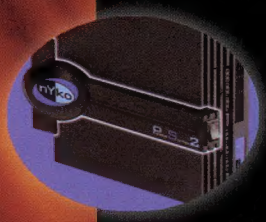

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ink

back to square
naka
phantasy star
ps3?
sega's f-zero!

edited by **play** magazine staff

FINALLY, THE FANTASY RETURNS

+SQUARESOFT

The RPG series that helped put Nintendo on top finally returns...

After a five-year hiatus, the *Final Fantasy* franchise will return to the Nintendo stable. The series that helped make Nintendo the giant they are today has been sorely missed the last half-decade, so this news comes as music to every Nintendo fans ears. It may also further Nintendo's plan to seep into the mature gaming demographic. The outline of the agreement is especially interesting in that Nintendo President Hiroshi Yamauchi will provide funds to a Square-affiliated game production company to help it develop software in the *Final Fantasy* series for Nintendo machines. It doesn't say exclusive in the wording, but it sure sounds exclusive.

The "affiliate" which will produce software allowing users of the GameCube and Game Boy Advance to play together by the end of the year, will be founded by Square and Akitoshi Kawazu, one of the game's developers, by the end of March. The franchise will, of course, continue over in the Sony camp as well.

The first game in the new deal: Final Fantasy Tactics

YUJI NAKA HONORED AT GDC

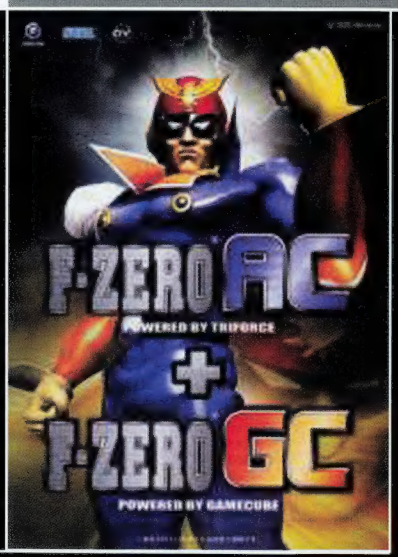
The creator of the 20 million (and count-ing) selling *Sonic the Hedgehog*—the game that single-handedly propelled the Sega Genesis to Nintendo's level and started the 16 roll that would become legend—was honored at this year's GDC, receiving the prestigious Lifetime Achievement award. As president and CEO of Sega's Sonic Team, Naka helmed such masterpieces as *Nights*, *Samba de Amigo* and *Phantasy Star Online*—among others. With any luck, he's working on that *Nights* sequel right now. Peter Moore had this to say: "SEGA has some of the most revered development studios in the industry, made up of creative talent committed to excellence in content development. Industry praise such as IGDA's recognition is further proof that SEGA has the development talent to dominate as a publisher of electronic entertainment." We couldn't agree more. *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Gunvalkyrie* work overtime at **play** HQ. United Game Artists, Inc. was also recognized by the IGDA for *Rez* which received the Game Innovation Spotlight award. The vector-based shooter was developed by Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the president and chief creative officer of United Game Artists, Inc., best known for the creation of *Space Channel 5*.

SEGA'S F-ZERO—NO, REALLY

THQ to publish Phantasy Star 1, 2, and 3 on GBA! Star Fox delayed...again.

The "holy shit, can this be real?!" news-story of March was definitely the announcement that Sega and Nintendo would be teaming up to create the next *F-Zero* game(s) for the Arcade and GameCube for the 3D-CG Triforce arcade board. Sega and Nintendo are collaborating on a new game system that will enable arcade and console games to interact via "Memory Card 59." Under the *F-Zero* agreement, the two ex-rivals will produce two games, *F-Zero AC* and *GC* (working titles) which will both be unveiled at this year's E3 and then released later this year! We can thank the Sega Studio Amusement Vision Ltd. (Daytona) for the gift, as it was their vision to create an arcade game that could interact with the GameCube that prompted the superpower anomaly. In a related story (well sorta'), THQ will publish *Crazy Taxi*, *Virtua Tennis*, *Super Monkey Ball*, and—get this—the first three *Phantasy Stars* on one cart, for the Game Boy Advance for a Spring 2003 release (with the exception of *V-Tennis*, which will make 2002). Armageddon can't be far behind. In other Nintendo news, Namco Limited, Sega Corporation and Nintendo Co., Ltd. have joined forces to develop a 3D computer graphics board for a next-generation coin-op system applying the architecture of the GameCube. Dubbed "TRIFORCE," the system board is designed to improve graphics performance and enhance overall arcade game play. Through their alliance, Namco and Sega will seek to expand the arcade game market, create a cost-effective environment for arcade game developers and establish a wholly new arcade to home synergy, bridging the gap between home and arcade gaming. And in still more Nintendo news: *Star Fox Adventures* has been delayed again, this time until September, which totally sucks, however, is par for the course for RARE whom won't release a game before its time. This always happens, and in the end, we're always glad they took the time needed to create a masterpiece. It still sucks, though.

We're still pinching ourselves too, but it's true. The planets have aligned; Sega and Nintendo are working together!



The Bandicoot's running with a whole new crowd.

XBOX

UNIVERSAL INTERACTIVE

EVERYONE

E

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mild Violence

CRASH BANDICOOT THE WRATH OF CORTEX

Crash. Maxed.

crashbandicoot.com

Here comes Crash, in the biggest character-based game to hit Xbox. The Wrath of Cortex. Lightning-fast load times. Super-enhanced graphics. Fully detailed environments. He's really going all out for this one.

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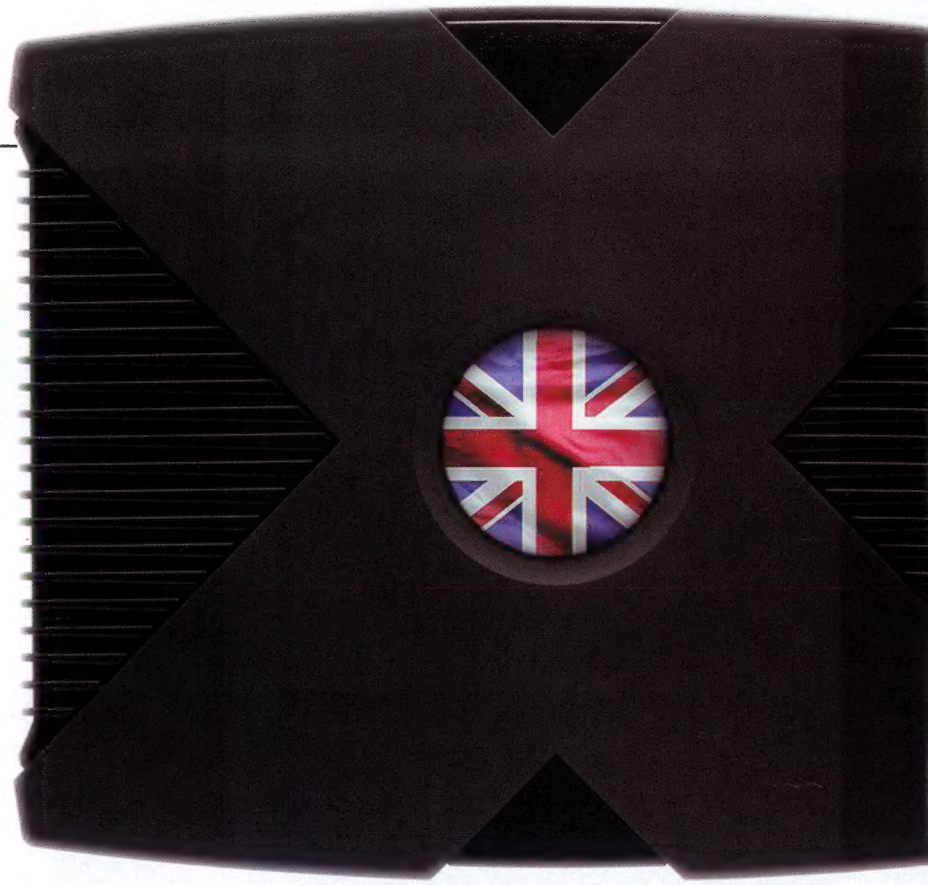


NEVER MIND THE BOLLOCKS, HERE'S THE XBOX

On March 14, the U.K., Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland all got the Xbox. It's like NATO—only with controllers. Microsoft expects to ship between 4.5 million and 6 million Xbox systems worldwide by the end of June. Xbox is the only console manufacturer with a European factory (in Sárvár, Hungary), which means stock can reach any retail outlet in Europe in less than three days.

While most of the U.K. is no doubt fixated on *Halo*, one can only wonder what's the rage in places like Ireland. We didn't even know they played games in Ireland. They have electricity? I can see it now, the lot of them, a wee bit drunk playing *Oddworld* down at the pub. Ah, they're a beautiful thing, these video-games. Meanwhile, in Spain, they anxiously await *Shakira: The Video-Game* (don't we all) while in Norway all they can think about is an *Ecco the Dolphin* port. Hopefully Microsoft will ship a special batch to the Middle East next—loaded with C4! Talk about particle effects…

DUST OFF THE PS ONE

Rockstar—creators of all things "M"—are bringing the highly acclaimed *Italian Job* to the PlayStation for the low, low price of just 9.99! Based on the 1969 cult classic starring Michael Caine, and the late, great Benny Hill, the game, touted by the *Official PlayStation 2 Mag* in the UK as "a truly great game" features the most exciting chases, storyline and thrills from the film, in a mission-based driving game that has you taking on the police, the mob, and gridlock, as you motor down church steps, between roofs, and across rivers—Lupin eat your heart out. In the film, Caine, straight outta the big house, decides to go straight to the bank and pull the heist of his life. For $9.99, sounds like we'll be doing the same.

The movie may be rated G, but that doesn't make the chases any less brutal!

NEWSBYTES

Sega announced March 30th, *Virtua Fighter Quest* an action/rpg based on the *Virtua Fighter* series for a 2003 release. The game, being developed by Sega's-AM2 division, will comemorate *Virtua Fighter*'s 10-year anniversary and incorporate every character from the VF universe. In other Sega news, *Phantasy Star I and II* will be released in Japan this July in two configurations: an Online Modem Set (9800 yen) and a Full Set (16600 yen) which will include the modem and a keyboard controller. We exoect the U.S. release to follow suit later this year. In still more Sega news, Smilebit (*Gunvalkyrie*, *JSRF*) and Red Company (*Bonk's Adventure*, *Super Tempo*) will team up for two PS2 games: *Gungrave* (pictred below) and *The Planet Gunsmoke: Trigun*, based on the manga on which the anime was based. Still more great game news: sources say Konami is developing *Contra* for the PS2 and GameCube.

RED/ SMILEBIT'S *GUNGRAVE*

ERRATA...

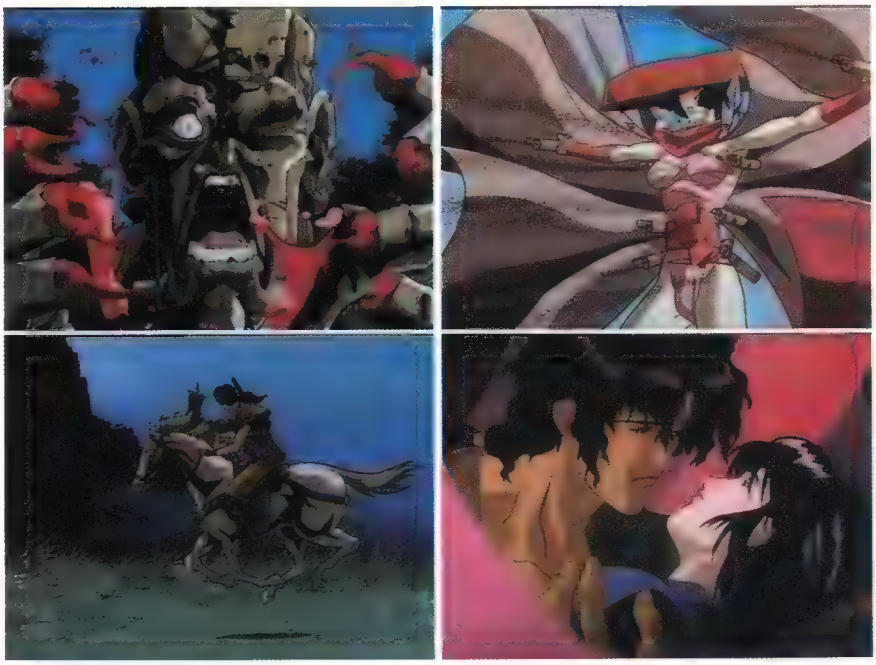
In the OOPS! dept. in last month's issue, both *Motocross Madness* and *Zone of the Enders* recieved the "Placeholder Review Bar Award," giving both perfect scores. *ZoE* should have recieved four stars, and *Motocross Maniacs*, three... still respectable.

CEL ME AN FPS GAME

Ubi Soft has announced the development of *XIII*, the company's first foray into the ever bur-geoning world of fist-person shooters. Set apart by its cel-shaded graphic novel look and feel, *XIII*, based on the comic license by Belgium author Jean Van Hamme, will be powered by Unreal engine technology and appear on all three major console platforms Q1 2003. The gist is a game that allows players to unravel clues behind a complex story through a series of real-time flashbacks—like reading, only without the book. UbiSoft has a dedicated internal development team to the project committed to developing a new bench mark in design, animation and interactivity. There's no doubt Ubi braintrust Michael Ancel is toiling away at *XIII* right now. *Rayman* is going to be jealous…

NINJA SCROLL COMES ALIVE

Threshold Entertainment has purchased the rights to the Kawajiri Yoshiaki's 1994 anime block-buster *Ninja Scroll* from the busiest studio in all of Japan, Madhouse. This first acquisition marks the beginning of their plan to create global mainstream entertainment based on anime properties. In other words, here we go. Tread carefully. If the budget is any indication, they aren't playing—*Ninja Scroll* has $60 million to fuel an FX-driven live-action film, and there are plans to branch out in to TV, video-games, music, and even live stage tours. The film will be produced by Threshold chairman, CEO Larry Kasanoff and company along with Hikaru Sasahara as co-producer. "Anime is today what video-games were seven years ago, an entirely different style of entertainment that will be mainstream in the very near future" says Kasanoff. We couldn't agree more.



PS3 IN 2003?!

Are we ready for another new console? This just in...

According to reliable sources, Sony will use IBM Microelectronics Cell architecture for the PS3, which could launch as early as next year. During the recent Game Developer's Conference in San Jose, Sony chief technology officer Shinichi Okamoto stopped just short of comfirming the union, stating that Sony and IBM know how would serve as the PS3's processor and software backbone. The Cell's compression engine will use a multi-processor engine (an engine for an engine) to reconstruct missing pixels or pieces in a streaming game or video. It is said that the architecture will usher in a new era of game design and redefine the graphics engine as we know it, replacing traditional graphics processors on which the GameCube and Xbox are currently based. In another bit of twisted sci-fi, applications using the CPU will benefit from its "self-healing" capabilities. Self-healing computers will be programmed not to go down, and Bus and processor areas are automatically corrected using a new meshed era redundancy technology. So when you're playing *Halo*, asking yourself if it can get any better—the answer is yes.

top 10

READERS TOP TEN

1.TBA
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READERS' MOST WANTED

1. TBA
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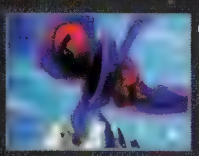
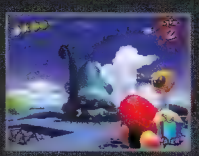


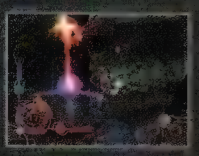


play MOST WANTED

1. MARIO SUNSHINE-GC
2. ZELDA-GC
3. PANZER DRAGOON 4-XBOX
4. MALICE-XBOX
5. STAR FOX ADVENTURES-GC
6. BLOODRAYNE-XBOX
7. RADIANT SILVERGUN 2-ARCADE
8. HALO 2-XBOX
9. TOMB RAIDER: AoD-PS2
10. WIPEOUT FUSION-PS2

play MOST WANTED: SEQUELS

1. NIGHTS 2
2. SHINOBI 6
3. GUNSTAR HEROES 2
4. MAGICIAN LORD 2
5. KID ICARUS 2
6. MISCHIEF MAKERS 2
7. BURNING RANGERS 2
8. GOLDEN AXE 4
9. GUN VALKYRIE 2
10.LANDSTALKER 2



play TOP TEN

1. GUN VALKYRIE -XBOX
2. JET SET RADIO FUTURE-XBOX
3. ONIMUSHA 2-PS2
4. RESIDENT EVIL-GC
5. SOCCER SLAM-GC
6. HERDY GERDY-PS2
7. MAXIMO-PS2
8. HEADHUNTER-PS2
9. SPR MARIO ADV. 2-GBA
10.VF4-PS2

BEST SELLING: MARCH

1. GTA 3-PS2
2. Super Mario Adv. 2-GBA
3. STATE OF EMERGENCY-PS2
4. SONIC ADV. 2 BATTLE-GC
5. WRECKLESS-XBOX
6. JETS ET RADIO FUTURE-XBOX
7. SONIC ADVANCE-GBA
8. TIGER WOODS PGA 2002-PS2
9. NBA 2K2-XBOX
10.FINAL FANTASY X-PS2

Meet your new instructor.

VF4 is revolutionizing the fighting genre with ground-breaking graphics, an all-new strategic attack and defense system, and a sophisticated training mode that enables you to become a champion martial arts warrior. Get the ultimate in hand-to-hand combat on a next generation gaming system.

Virtua Fighter 4

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TEEN T Violence

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Only on PlayStation 2

PlayStation 2

SEGA

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play games

016 malice
024 bloodrayne
026 tomb raider: the angel the darkness
028 dragon's lair 3D
030 quantum redshift
032 spider-man: the movie game
033 mechassault
034 kung fu chaos
035 rayman arena
036 onimusha 2
038 bomberman: generations
039 capsule previews
041 mario tennis 2
041 mario golf 2
041 mario sunshine
041 mario tennis 2
041 star fox adventures
042 bruce lee
044 the thing
046 star wars: jedi starfighter
048 blood omen 2
050 barbarian
052 headhunter
054 endgame
055 downforce
056 command + conquer: renegade
064 capsule reviews
060 ripping friends (gba)
062 king of fighters: neo blood (gba)
064 sheep (gba)
065 monster force (gba)
066 gba previews/reviews
072 play japan

review legend

perfect
stellar
great
good
average
poor

MATURE
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
BLOOD AND GORE
VIOLENCE
EIDOS
INTERACTIVE
CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

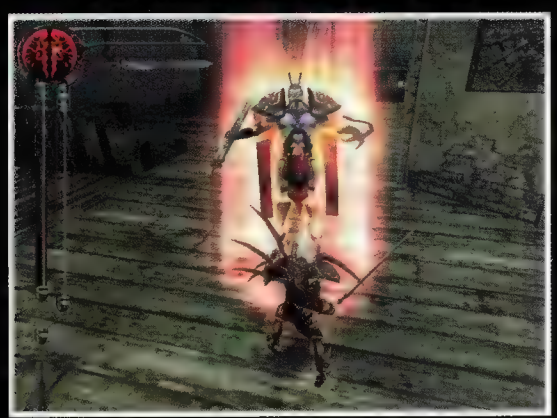
Be Still Thy Beating Heart

– Kain

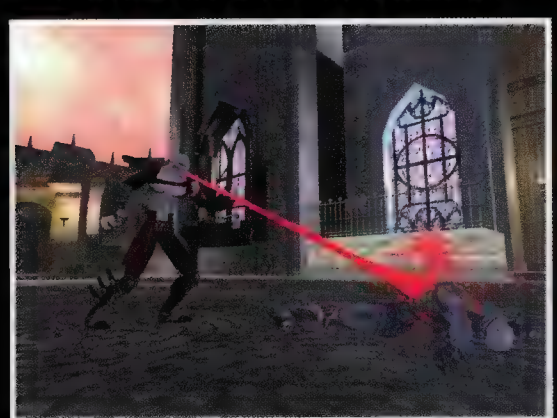
You're sure to be floored by Kain's brand of open heart surgery and skillful head removal

– EGM

Kain returns to video gaming's high-throne of bloodthirsty bad-asses.



When battle-ax and sword edges dull, Kain turns to Dark Gifts such as rupture and possession.



Whether in pursuit of power or just for the thrill of the kill, Kain's lust for blood is inspiring.

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This game is intended for mature audiences ONLY.

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BLOOD OMEN 2

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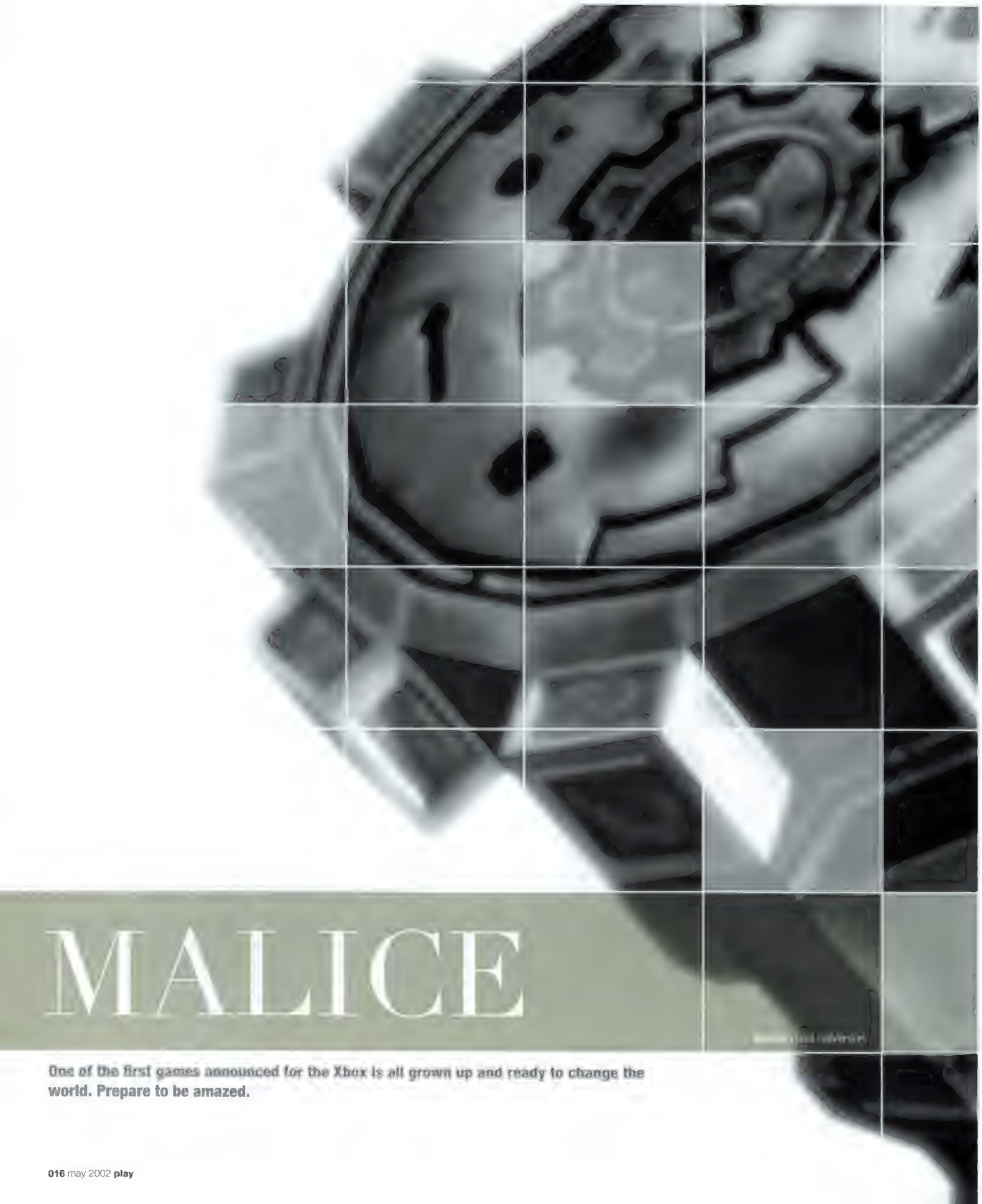


MALICE

One of the first games announced for the Xbox is all grown up and ready to change the world. Prepare to be amazed.

The first time I laid eyes on *Malice*—propped up manga-style with her massive Clockwork hammer—I knew she had to adorn the cover of **play**, especially coming from Argonaut, one of the world's most esteemed developers. Since that first meeting, she's grown up a bit (all the better) from a little girl to a teenager, and has become the subject of a game that flaunts it's pedigree like Bjork does an Oscar dress. Laid out over 22 free-roaming levels that are the very definition of layered gameplay, the world of *Malice* is like a twisted cartoon smorgasbord, accented by a dark metallic edge. The gameplay runs deep, incorporating elements of puzzle-solving, platforming, and hard-hitting action, but I could say that about a lot of games. What makes *Malice* so special is the attention to detail that Argonaut has applied, the unique nature of each scenario, and above all, the universe and ambience that the *Malice* team has created—easily one of the most creative ever hatched. With species like the Crogs, a genetic mutation of dog and crow, incorporating the most vile qualities of each; and the Crow Legions, a diseased race of frightening birds who's accelerated evolution has rendered them insane—it's instantly clear that bent minds are at work here, assembling a twisted fantasy world for us to loose ourselves in. You have to love a villain like Atilla the Shunn'd who prowls his domain in an animated chair because half of his body has rotted away. You just don't get enemies like that much these days. Species such as these might normally be vanquished by an large axe-wielding He-Man or perhaps a mighty creature, but in this case, the heroine is a spritley teenage girl with an anime guise and one big chunk of a hammer—which, I must point out, is so much more than meets the eye. This isn't a game where you scamper about whacking beasts with a hammer—it is a little, but the mallet is used for many other purposes. Of course, visually, as you can see, Argonaut has all the Xbox's gears spinning—as bump-mapping abounds—and you'll be amazed at what they've achieved with the PS2 version. They are certainly a force to be reckoned with. **So, without further ado, a rare interview with Argonaut's Team Malice....**

"DEATH WANTS NO PART OF THIS STRANGE GIRL... TOO MUCH PAPERWORK!"

INTERVIEW

Although they are responsible for some of the last decade's most memorable games, interviews with Argonaut aren't exactly commonplace. In celebration of what looks to be their most spectacular game yet: some insight from Team Malice.

Is *Malice* an Argonaut original concept? From the minds who brought us....
Malice is a 100% original title, from some of the Argonaut talent that goes all the way back as far as *Starglider*.

How long have you been working on it?
Malice on Xbox has been in development for about 16 months from the original demonstration software Microsoft approached us to do for the presentation by Bill Gates back in January 2001. It has been signed with Sierra Entertainment since July 2001.

We're looking at a new franchise here, right?
Every new character-based game is a potential new franchise, isn't it? In the case of *Malice*, the world and environments were properly developed to create a property that can be made primarily into a game but easily extends itself—perhaps a film, cartoon, book and so on.

What's the story about?
A headless girl stands before Death on the Beach of Souls. While Soul Eaters ravage the poor deceased, Death wants no part of this strange girl.... too much paperwork! For she is Malice, a Temporal-Deity-Paradox who starts our game having just failed to save the world from a time-splitting disaster! But she must find out how things came to such a disastrous end?

To find out, she has to travel back and forth through the time portals of an Orrery, the machine that turns the Universe! She learns to power up the great machine and gain access to alternate time-lines, begging, borrowing and stealing weapons and magic as she goes, and when the calm descends before the storm, and she's defeated Elemental Guardians, and watched the assassination of a giant Tree God by a maniacal JuJu Gunman, and used a giant robot armor to help the Bird Resistance force down the menace of a time-traveling Crow Militia, then—finally—she'll undergo one the last incredible transformation and become a Goddess...one powerful enough to take on the nuclear wrath of the Menace behind this all.

Once *Malice* takes off, seeing as how the foundation will already be laid, how long will we have to wait for a sequel?
This really depends on where we wish to take the property. Initial design ideas have already been thought about and discussed, but we haven't made any firm decision on where to go creatively. From a technological point of view, we already have our next generation of engine and tool set up and running so the next incarnation of *Malice* will remain on the cutting edge.

Setting out to create a new platform phenom, what are the biggest challenges before you?
Creating compelling gameplay and characters alongside an epic storyline arc within a vast and unique world.... it's easy to set yourself the task, but very hard to deliver. We really feel like we're getting there. The goal we set ourselves was to create a darkly surreal, comic adventure with a cool heroine who would constantly be trying to fix a world gone mad, only to find that she'd often make things much, much worse.

What does your drawing board look like? Can we look forward to a host of new play mechanics? Talk to us about the hammer and how it is used throughout the game....
Many of our drawing boards look like we should be locked up and declared mentally unwell. [laughs] There are some very mad creatures and environments in the game! The intention was always to come up with some bizarre twists

unique to Malice and her environment: The Mace of Clubs—particularly handy with Wood magic and against Earth and Water, but vulnerable to Fire and Metal. It gives the player handy glide ability as well as an extended Root Quake. Because of the Xbox demo, Malice has become known as the girl with the big hammer. The Clockwork Hammer to be exact; an unfeasibly large, don't mess with me armament constructed out of machinery...as such you can find code to program special moves into it...Decoder, Hammer Storm and MowOmatic. But great as it is against other machines, against Wood and Earth, it doesn't like Water or the Crow army's Fire arsenal for some reason! The pinnacle of destructive power is the Quantum Tuning Fork, a weapon to manipulate or trash the very structure of the magic elements around it...but you'll just have to wait and see!

Magic provides a stunningly powerful attack and defense gameplay system all in it's own right, but with this arsenal, both complement each other.

What do you consider to be the gold standard in the action/platforming category?
Anything out of the Nintendo stable, the *Zelda* games being particular favorites. Plenty of Rare stuff, too. Recently, both *Jak and Daxter* and *Maximo* have been very fine examples of the genre, with a level of polish and quality that set a standard for us all.

Are the levels themselves more vast in terms of space or depth?
We're trying to lose the concept of levels to create one large world and its time-lines—some go high, some low, some wide and some cramped...variety keeps the player interested. There's a number of clever techniques to keep things seamless for the most part so that we create the sense of one continuous world, where that is appropriate...obviously, with travel through Elemental Gates and Crow Army Portals, there is a definite break, as there should be when you travel through time!

Are you working off of a central hub? How is the game set up?
Different elemental timelines spin out from a central super-hub. The five elements we mentioned before—Wood, Water, Earth, Metal & Fire—form a surreally themed set of hubs, with unique characters that interact with the player as well as with the invading Crow Militia. Each of these Elemental hubs then has a number of levels branching off, too. Our gameplay structure is based on Quest and skill progression, general adventuring and discovery as well as developing the overall evolution of our weird histories and timelines. There's lots of weird and wonderful characters and bosses. Kat explores expanding and branching worlds from a central hub-to-hub structure, revisiting levels that evolve through time alongside our expanding story line. Multiple quests can be running at any given time. Each quest either directly or indirectly opens the path to explore deeper into the game and gain magic skills and weaponry...obviously, the bigger the game is, the more intriguing a challenge this becomes.

Will you be incorporating cinemas? If so, will they be real-time?
The quality of the visuals is so good on XBox that we feel our cinematic sequences look great in-game, and are more consistent as a consequence.

What kind of music are you implementing?
It's an interactive orchestral score, with real-time mixing and sequencing of multi-layered music.

Malice seems anime/manga-inspired. What inspired her look?
Certainly, anime and manga are great influences of the team. Many of us are fans of the artist Hiyao Miyazaki's works, as well as Shiro Masamune and Katsuhiro Otomo. The game's style also shows our love of Tim Burton and Jan Svankmajer.

You just don't see design docs like this every day. The amount of creativity behind *Malice* shines through in every aspect of the game.

"Volt"
SKull-Cap
The sKull-cap fixed to the top of the throne supplies an extra electrical charge to Attila if he wishes to display his full power.
Attila's Throne
This animated chair allows Attila to roam his domain ever since the lower portion of his body rotted away.
Throne Legs
The legs of Attilas chair operate like that of a horse. If angered it will rear up on its hind legs before its foe.
Attila The Shunn'd

Jean Pierre Jeunot, and many, many others.... basically, we've developed our own feel based on the things we love about all these people's works. On a purely practical level too, big eyes show up well on a player character.

She seems to have evolved, in the right direction, since the early stages of development. Is this due to the Xbox and PS2's teen-plus demographic? Will she end up being at all sexy, in an anime kind of way?
She is older since we shifted to Xbox, the demographic being older as you rightly point out. We've been doing things to make her that little bit sexier, but what we most like about her is her sarcastic humor and her use of huge weapons. [laughs]

What doors do the Xbox and PS2 technology open for you, and where will *Malice* benefit most as a result?
Quite simply, the amazing amount of power that is available in the current console hardware means that we are now able to do things that we couldn't have dreamed of a few years ago. At the basic level of the pure number of practical polygons—textured and so on—what that these platforms can push is amazing. With the custom video hardware we can use, on the Xbox, for example, the pixel shaders to create some astounding visuals as well as packing much more gameplay environments and data onto a DVD. The sheer power we have in these consoles means that we are simply able to realize a project like *Malice* without compromise and deliver a fantastic product to the end user.

"WE HAVE FINALLY BEEN FREED TO LET OUR IMAGINATIONS RUN RIOT"

We're told the Xbox version will run at 30fps while the PS2 game will run at 60fps. Shouldn't it be the other way around? Does bump-mapping chew up that much space?
Both consoles have their strong points and weak points and *Malice* is being created to make use of the hardware available to the respective hardware. We have some excellent engines, tools, tricks and systems that will provide a fantastically playable game experience on whichever console you have.

We presume the Xbox is a joy to work on. Is it? Imagining the kind of bump-mapping we saw in *Shrek* and *Halo* in an Argonaut platformer is an exciting proposition. Have you been able to lay it on thick?
There is so much power under the hood of the Xbox! The programming team has created an engine and toolset that allows us to create a fantastic looking—yet playable—game. For example, on the textures alone we can easily apply all sorts of beautiful visual effects such as diffuse, bumps, lights—self-illumination and specular—detail mapping, filtering, transparencies and so on. Each level of effect can be animated separately as well to provide even more visual depth. We have finally been freed to let our imaginations run riot and produce the kind of artwork we have always wanted to. Since our first public outing with the game demo back at CES 2001, we have developed even more special techniques and found some amazing new features within the Xbox. All of our art team have now honed their skills to a very high degree and use all of the features and the real-time lighting and shadows to produce some of the most stunning graphical levels ever.

Will you be able to simulate bump-mapping on the PS2?
We're planning to simulate bump-mapping in software as well as some other cool features. The basic PS2 renderer is very fast and so allows us to handle more render passes than most.

Why no GameCube version; or is it planned?
There is always a possibility of moving *Malice* to other platforms. At this moment, we have all decided to

"WHAT WE MOST LIKE ABOUT HER IS HER SARCASTIC HUMOR AND HER USE OF HUGE WEAPONS."

concentrate on the Xbox and PS2 to ensure that the two teams do not lose focus at any point. Any decision is still in the air.

Who is *Malice* designed for specifically? Will enthusiast platformer addicts be pleasantly surprised?
We certainly hope so...we set about creating some clever platform gameplay, and to put the *Malice* spin on it so that you feel like you're always playing something in context to the story as opposed to formulaic set-pieces. The story actually unfolds through the characters you play against...something perhaps a little more along the lines of RPGs than most platformers, although recent examples are crossing that genre barrier, too.

What has Team *Malice* completed recently—any *Croc* or *Buck* alumni on the project; and are they separate from the team working on your other biggie, *Orchid*?
The *Malice* teams have worked on all sorts of products over the years and so there is a big mixture of experience on the team, including the products you mention. They are completely independent from the *Orchid* team in terms of development, but we do encourage content sharing throughout the Argonaut group so there is always some cross over.

Is the brunt of gameplay more platforming or puzzle solving?

THE Crow Legions

The Crow Militia

Scrawny and disease-ridden, The Crow Militia uphold the corrupt aims of their leader.
Their motivation is evolution, a reward for their loyalty.
But accelerated evolution comes with a high price.

Mutation, insanity and cancerous wounds are very common.

Fire Cannon

The Crow Guard are all equipped with weapons called Fire Cannons
Huge cumbersome weapons that spray gallons of highly flamable liquid

Neanderthal Crow

There's some fiendish puzzles, but the core gameplay lies in the magic/combat and platform gameplay.

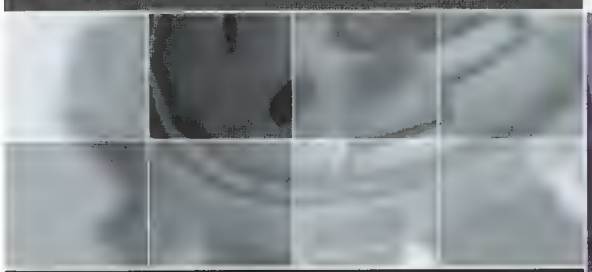
What has been your biggest challenge so far?
To push the hardware as far as we can. Creative teams will always want to see how far technology will allow them to go, and we have a lot of talented individuals on the team. Next-gen audiences want that extra amount of quality that the hardware allows us to deliver.

What are you most proud of about the game?
It is a deeply immersive and stunningly beautiful game with wonderful characters to encounter and surreal histories to unravel. Prophecies unfold, strange and wonderful weaponry fends off the apocalypse that draws ever closer, until, at the end of the world, we fight a mile high hell-hound in a giant steampunk mecha-suit.

Out of curiosity, how many of the original *Star Fox* team are still at Argonaut?
We still have a few people who worked on the original *Star Fox* and who were deeply involved in the Super FX chip design and programming. Some of the original staff moved to ARC and other's simply moved on with their careers. The members still at Argonaut are actively involved in helping us to continue to create excellent entertainment software.

Also, for being the greatest vehicular action game ever made, why wasn't Red Dog bigger? Shouldn't you bump map it and get it out on the Xbox right away?
We think so! Thank you for the compliment on Red Dog, we agree with you. You never know what the future holds...

As always we're looking forward to another stunner from you guys. Our thanks for still being so focused on quality. Since *Star Fox*, we've seen nothing but great things from you. What's your secret?
A complete commitment from each team member in the company to producing the best games ever and a great creative work environment. Everyone here enjoys creating the stuff they do and taking it to the limit.



"PROPHECIES UNFOLD, STRANGE AND WONDERFUL WEAPONRY FENDS OFF THE APOCOLYPSE THAT DRAWS EVER CLOSER."

The Xbox's bump-mapping capabilities bring vibrant life into the amazing world of Malice

XBOX PS2

MALICE

preview

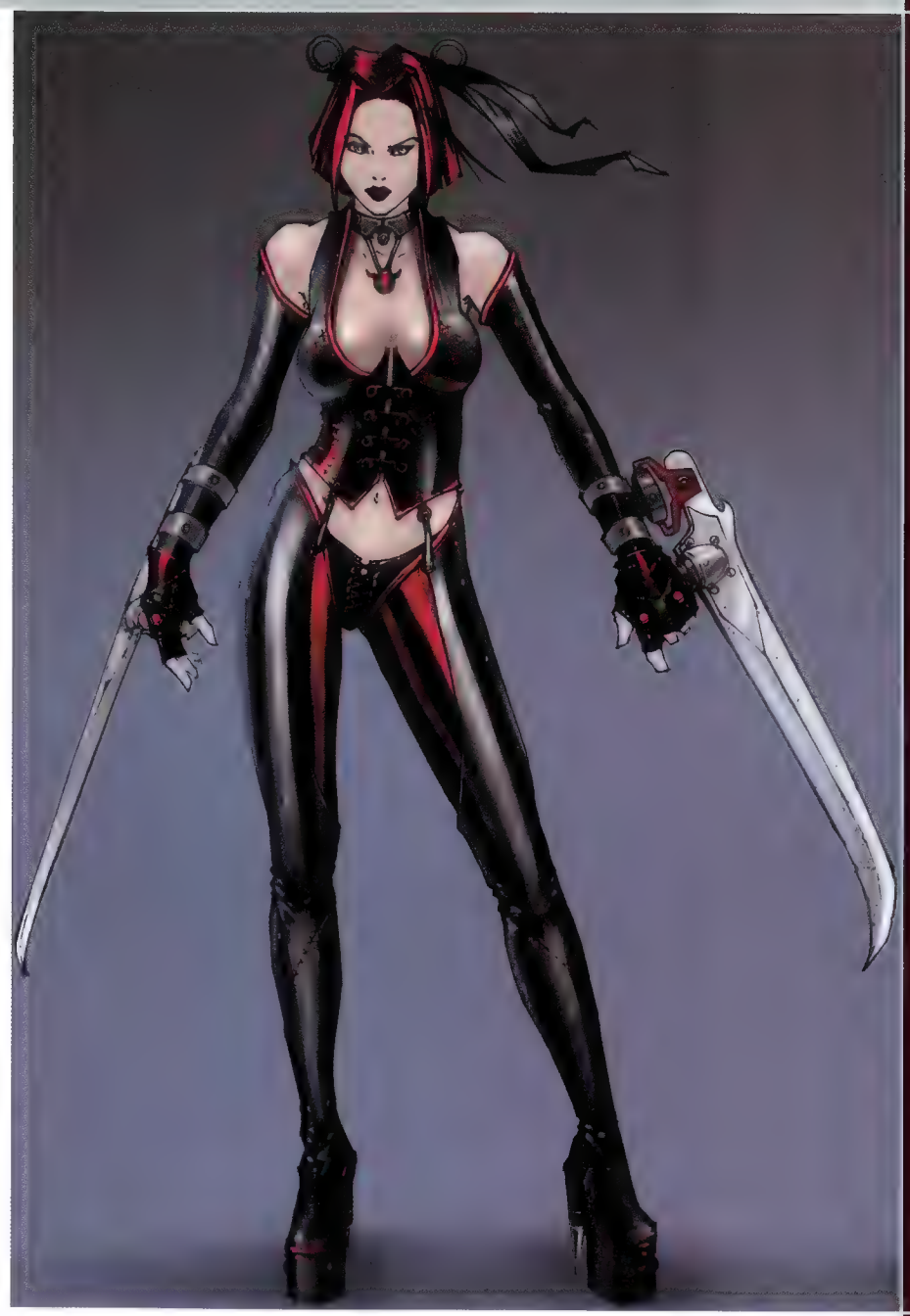
Developer: Argonaut Publisher: Sierra Available: September

Following Tiger's secret [illegible] a new platformer since *Super Mario 64*

RAYNE ON ME

Majesco's sultry vampire queen moves closer to her video-game debut

words dave halverson



We need to get *Bloodrayne* and *Vampire Hunter D* together. They're both half vamp—both possess supernatural speed, strength, regeneration and horror chic—and wouldn't they make a happy couple. It's a match made in Hell (although, something tells me few would survive the actual reception). Bloodrayne is going to busy for a while anyway—she has a job to complete while we stare at her ass, using her as a vessel to play out yet another sick fantasy, something gamers get to do all the time—which explains why we're so well adjusted.

Bloodrayne works for a top-secret international fraternity, the Brimstone Society. Initially deployed in the bayous of Louisiana in 1933, she uncovers an isolated outbreak of mutated humans and swamp creatures, but gets wind of a much larger Nazi plot (perpetrated by her soon-to-be nemesis, Jurgen Wulf) to find powerful relics that will enable them to rule the world (the dream of every Nazi). Of course, this just won't do, because Weinershnitzel and dark beer suck ass.

Fast forward five years, with the world on the brink of war, the events of Louisiana have been all but forgotten as Bloodrayne sets out on a mission to a German Sub bay located in Argentina which houses a special division of the German army called the Gegengeist Gruppe, or GGG (anti-ghost group). It's rumored the GGG are dabbling in the occult to ensure victory for the Germans in the upcoming war (okay, I'm now officially getting the urge to bust into Ahnuld impressions: "You set us up!"). Her objective is to infiltrate, see just what the hell the Krauts are up too, and of course, kill the lot of them, which she does so very, very, well. The first thing that grabbed me—playing an early version of the game—was her grabbing victims, wrapping her nimble bod around them and digging in like she hadn't drank in a week. Meanwhile, Wulf makes off with all but one relic to a vampire-infested castle in Germany where the game takes on an entirely new dimension.

Playing the game (all to briefly), what I believe will make *Bloodrayne* stand out in a sea of third-person action adventures—beyond the premise and all of the cool ambience that goes along with it—is the way she kills, the weapons she can use, and her nimble dexterity. Bloodrayne can scamper up pillars and walls, silently drop-in behind an enemy and use him as a human shield turning his weapon against any witnesses in the process. This is one of those games that unfolds a certain way depending on how you play it and how good you are at it. It's also one of the few action adventure games to successfully incorporate deep playability without resorting to box puzzles and lever throwing. At least that's how it's looking early on.

To say the least, we are brimming with anticipation, waiting anxiously to play any semblance of a buttoned up level. At the very least, Bloodrayne herself is the epitome of dangerous beauty—a woman capable of truly fulfilling your every desire before she tears out your neck and slips your jugular between her lips.

Is it just me or does this not seem like such a bad way to go?

"Nazi bastard! Die like the pig you are!"

"WRAPPING HER NIMBLE BOD AROUND THEM, SHE DIGS IN LIKE SHE HASN'T DRANK IN A WEEK."

XBOX PS2

BLOODRAYNE

preview

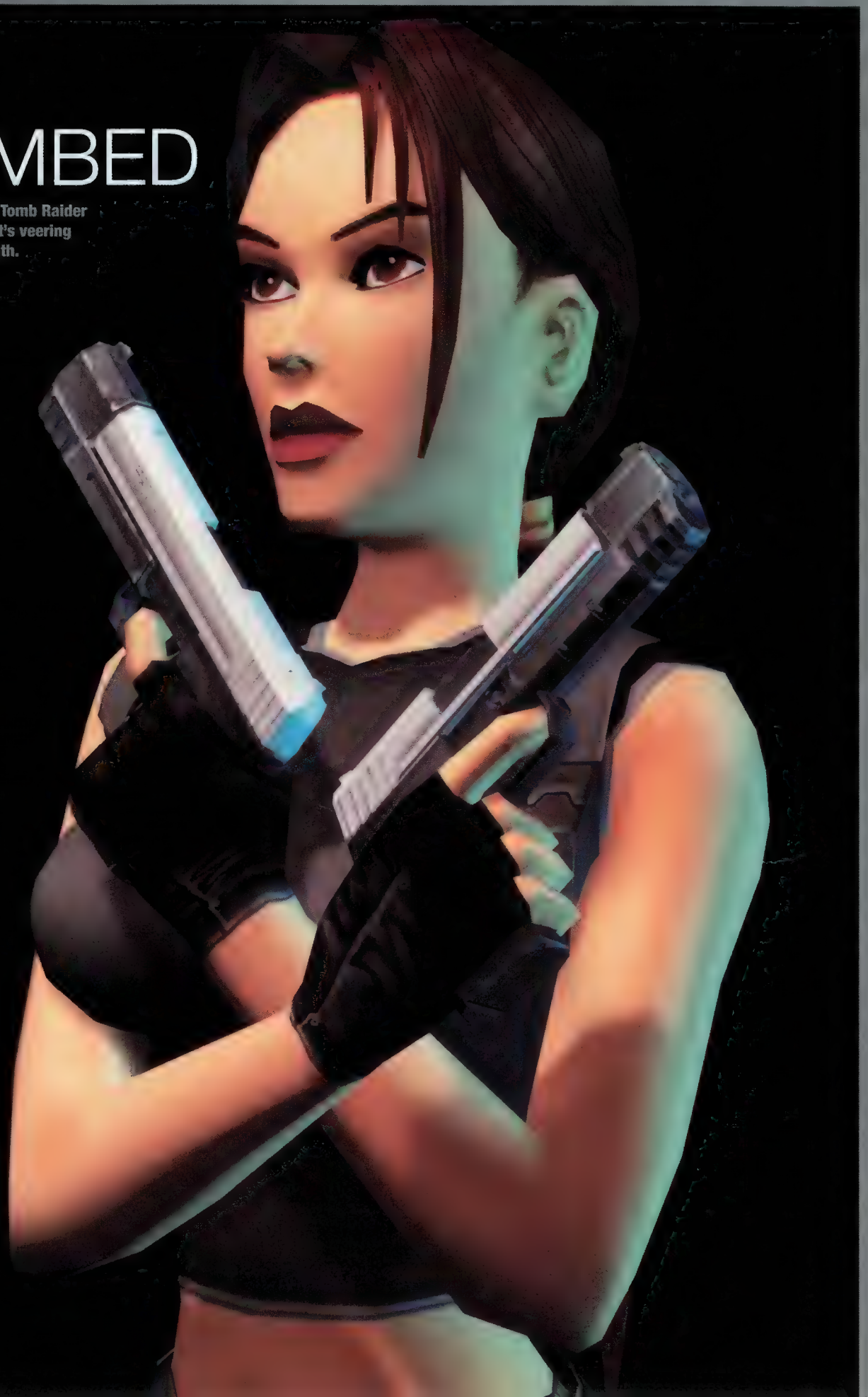
developer: terminal reality publisher: majesco available: october

It's already quite apparent that Majesco has the next big vampire franchise in the body bag. Hopefully, these next few months will seal the deal.

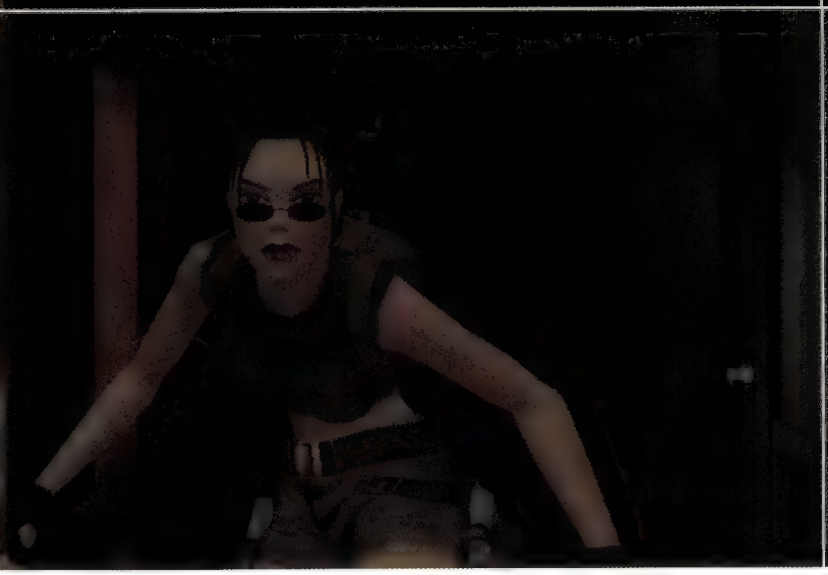
ENTOMBED

Lara is back. But this isn't the Tomb Raider you embraced on the PSone—it's veering onto a completely 'different' path.

words jon m gibson



"AS A FURTHER PUSH TO RE-BRAND THE *TOMB RAIDER* NAME...A SECOND PLAYABLE CHARACTER WILL BE INTRODUCED."



It obvious: *The Angel of Darkness* sees Laura through the darkest path in her console life

The phone rings. And the voice on the other end convinces Lara Croft, clad in causal wear, to enter the free-roaming environment of Paris. No weapons; very few clues. Lara is merely tossed into a *Monkey Island* mode of gameplay—a "walk and discover" mentality that has never been broached in the extensive history of the *Tomb Raider* franchise. Quickly, though, Lara finds some faithful gear—most importantly, loads of ammo and some skimpy threads—in preparation to enter the underbelly of France.

That's the first sign that the franchise is breathing fresh air. *The Angel of Darkness*, the game's seductively sinister official title, is the second. This being Lara's inaugural next-gen epic, a console exclusive to the PS2, the bare-bones beginning and the edgy surname give birth to something that Core hopes will reinvent their baby. And by all reasonable accounts, they've already succeeded.

And as a further push to re-brand the *Tomb Raider* name—veering the public away from their recognition of just Lara Croft, the busty babe—a second playable character will be introduced. Welcome Curtis Trent, a scruffy, taut explorer hot on the trail of five stolen paintings that Lara herself seeks. But the ultimate task at hand is not as simple as a finding a few lost Picasos. There is an evolution—in particular, one that defies the tongue-in-cheek atmosphere of all the previous installments—involving an insidioßus 14th-century alchemist called Eckhardt and a plot that descends into gruesome territory. Enter an unholy race of resurrected beasts, the Nephilim, hybrids of humans and angels that lurk in the shadows; they are the hellish, grotesque creatures that lead the gameplay into a path rarely traveled by *any* video-game. Core isn't afraid to get their beloved franchise dirty—in fact, expect a walk down the perpetually dark side, a gritty, evocative third-person action-adventure that admittedly draws inspiration from the moving-picture resumes of David Fincher and Luc Besson.

But *Angel of Darkness* is only the beginning of a five-chapter legacy. The entire book is already written; and it's probably the most complicated serial—not for just Lara—but in the chronicles of all gamedom. Be sure to secure some extra rounds.

PS2

TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS

preview

developer: core publisher: eidos available: fall

At first, hardcore followers of the franchise may shake their head in dismay, but this new installment in the *Tomb Raider* series promises one thing, adventure like you've never seen before

LAIR REBORN

The age-old Dragon's Lair franchise gets a little taste of 3D magic on the next-gen console

words Jon M Gibson

It's been a while. But after a 3D facelift and some major next-gen surgery, the calamities of Dirk the Daring are exploiting the power of the 21st century console.

"The game recreates the original, but in a 3D—instead of a 2D—way," Will Panganiban, Lead Designer & Creative Director, reveals. "*Dragon's Lair* fans will recognize the characters—Dirk, Daphne, Singe—and many of the rooms. But the new version will take the storyline further, revealing back stories on some of the characters, offering hundreds of new rooms, and introducing lots of new characters."

Like the vintage quarter-gobbling arcade editions—a legendary adventure that has since been inducted into the Smithsonian Institution (one of only three video-games to graduate with such honors, including *Pac-Man* and *Pong*)—players must rescue a regular captive in the franchise, the dainty damsel in distress, Princess Daphne. But this seek-and-extract mission is by no means as complicated as a David Lynch screenplay. Moving through a series of over 250 rooms, the fearless, button-mashing knight in all of us must navigate fiery pits, dodge swinging pendulums, and defeat some 40 diverse villains of the animated sort, all of whom claim residency in the less-the-humble abode of Mordroc, a nasty, malicious wizard that fans should remember quite vividly. There are even some new additions to the roster of beasts, including the Lightning Drake—but rest assured, Rick Dyer, Don Bluth and Gary Goldman (game designer and animators, respectively, of the previous *Dragon's Lair* installments) have close ties with this brave new update. Bluth has hand-animated some fresh opening and closing sequences; and Christopher Stone, composer of the original's epic score, lends his talents to the project (with action riffs now boosted in Dolby Surround, thanks to the audio perks of the PS2 and GameCube).

With the concept of 1983's coin-op remains intact, players don't get away with the ease of simple, one-button taps. "In *Dragon's Lair 3D*, players will have full control of Dirk,"

The action of the game is no longer limited by single button swings

Dirk now has miles of free-roaming environments to roam

"DIRK'S CHARACTER ALONE EMPLOYEES A CRISP, FLUID DECK OF 150 ANIMATIONS."

Panganiban continues, "so there will be many more control moves than just 'up' or 'left.' There will also be lots of gameplay opportunities, such as combat, chase sequences and puzzle solving. The new version has been designed to feel a lot like the original—with all of the adrenaline rush and time pressure fans expect from *Dragon's Lair*—but with a whole lot more."

The team at Dragonstone Software also opted to maintain a visual style that wouldn't upset the already huge fan base—luckily, with modern tech, the process doesn't involve gallons of paint, piles of acetate, and hundreds of eraser nubs. "The game's graphic appeal comes from the combination of hand-painted textures developed using the assets of the original 2D game, a cel-shader, and models carefully created to stand out against the backgrounds," Panganiban details. As such, Dirk's character model alone employees a crisp, fluid deck of 150 animations, making his quest to rescue Daphne from the clutches of sinister green dragon, Singe, extremely eye-appealing. And in a world consumed by cel-shading, a technique that has become as band wagon as those rousing Listerine breath strips, manipulating the formula a bit is never frowned upon (glance over at the screenshots; this *3D* fantasy has a distinct presence that defies "the look" that games like *Wacky Races* launched into stardom).

But wait: *Dragon's Lair was* essentially the first cel-shaded game. Go figure.

NINTENDO GAMECUBE PS2

DRAGON'S LAIR 3D preview

developer: dragonstone publisher: encore available: fall

It was a daunting task, but developer Dragonstone seems to have tapped into a 3D world that breathes life into the vintage coin-op franchise. Adding a new dimension is not an easy thing to do

QUANTUM LEAP

The bold new face of futuristic racing...

Professional driver on a closed track. Definitely try this at home.

"TORMENT, TAUNT AND SABOTAGE."

DAVE MACPHERSON

XBOX

QUANTUM REDSHIFT	preview
developer curly dog publisher microsoft available summer	*Wipeout* may finally have some real competition in the futuristic racing category. It's obvious that Curly Dog has the skills – and there's always room for one more

Enemies have a lock on your tail,
you barrel roll at mach 2 and let 'em have it...

ARE YOU READY FOR THIS KIND OF ACTION?

TOP GUN™
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TITUS

Paramount 90th ANNIVERSARY

Rating Pending

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Top Gun:
Firestorm Advance
Coming Soon on:

GAME BOY ADVANCE

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

PlayStation.2

Check out TOP GUN on your internet enabled phone - http://topgun.ngame.com/

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WEB MASTER

The tradition of quality Spider-Man games continues with Treyarch at the helm of America's number one multi-media franchise

Back when the 16-bit era was building a head of steam, all anyone could think about was a game based on *Spider-Man*. Since Sega started the initial roll, Spidey has spun his way across the Genesis, 32X, Nintendo 64, PlayStation and Dreamcast, making Spider-Man games common place in the process. The franchise has become somewhat predictable—although steeped in quality—with Neversoft setting the standard for the polygonal strain of the title.

With the Spider-Man movie just around the corner—which, if you've been following its journey to the big screen, is a huge occasion—all dressed up in shiny CGI and big-budget Hollywood attire, it's definitely time for the game to evolve, and at least initially, it seems like that's exactly what's happening. Fans of *Spider-Man* will have to adjust just a little (although classic control is an option), getting used to Spidey's new digs, but the game is looking as fresh and timely as the movie, as it's in the able hands of Treyarch who did such a great job with the *Tony Hawk* franchise, *Draconus*, *Max Steele*, and the *Spider-Man* port for Dreamcast. The new game seems less removed, with a greater level of immersion for the player. In addition to web slinging, which is now an automatic sequence steered and pitched by the left analog, we're treated to scenarios that unfold in a more cinematic vein, using premonition and clever camera sweeps to frame the action ahead. Our test version was too early to judge in terms of the camera (which needed the most work), control and balance, but the scenarios and look of the game border on greatness.

DAVE HALVERSON

"FANS WILL HAVE TO ADJUST A LITTLE TO SPIDEY'S NEW DIGS, BUT THE GAME IS LOOKING FRESH AND TIMELY."

XBOX | NINTENDO GAMECUBE

SPIDER-MAN: THE MOVIE GAME — preview

developer: treyarch | publisher: activision | available: now

This may be the best Spider-Man game yet, and that's no small order. Treyarch has done a fantastic job injecting some fresh concepts into the formula

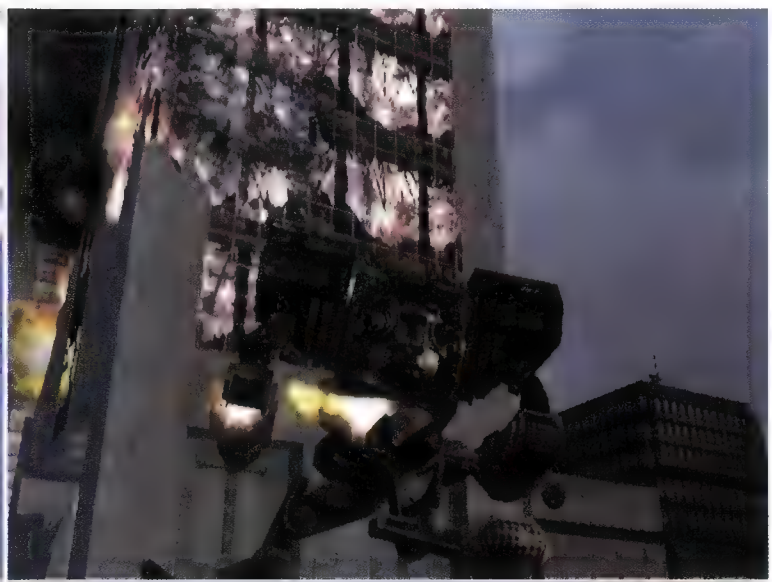
HEAVY METAL

BattleTech gets a fresh new look as a new chapter pounds it's way onto Xbox

"GIANT ROBOTS PICKING AWAY AT OFFICE BUILDINGS HAS NEVER EVEN COME CLOSE TO LOOKING THIS GOOD."

Prepare to rethink the way you feel about mech shooters. *MechAssault*, the new sci-fi action-shooter based on the BattleTech franchise (which was due for a meaty overhaul) is coming to the Xbox this Fall—and the game looks sensational. The gameplay depicted in these screens—especially in the big city—has to be seen to be believed. Giant robots picking away at office buildings has never even come close to looking this good. Over 12 mechs will be available throughout the game, which is said to feature an unprecedented level of destruction. Day One studios, an amalgam of talented developers, is shooting for something truly spectacular with *MechAssault*. After seeing this game in action, I'd have to say that they are achieving that goal.

DAVE HALVERSON



MECHASSAULT | preview

developer: day one | publisher: microsoft | available: summer

I remember thinking how amazing *Iron Soldier* was back when the Jaguar pushed a few polygons. Now look at the state of this! God, I love the Xbox!

SD WARRIORS

Microsoft jumps on the kung fu bandwagon—but doesn't take it the least bit seriously

Bruce Lee would be prying the nails from his coffin if he knew how much his martial artistry has transformed into a sport of over-the-top humor—at least in America. As *Kung Pow: Enter the Fist*, last year's high-kicking parody/box office bomb, showed us, there is no longer drama in the ancient Asian practice of concentration and death chops. It's all shits and giggles.

Now *Kung Fu Chaos*, an exclusive Xbox entrant, transforms that passive parody into an outrageous, interactive battlefield. It begins with credits from some low-profile fictional fighters, most of whom are searching aimlessly for the spotlight: Chop & Styx, a isolated-samurai-type with a kid harnessed to his back; Ninja Fu Hiya, a stealth warrior who tries just a tad too hard; Candi Roll, a down-and-out female smack-layer (she's a frequent contestant on *Casting Couch Shuffle*); and Xui Tan Sour, a vendetta-driven starlet, chasing after those who knocked off her father, brother, village and, um, pet goldfish.

"Remember old school kung fu movies that had questionable dubbing, hilarious mistranslation and ridiculous 'you-killed-my-brother' plot lines? And how they reached a heady mix during the 70s, merging with disco, funk and blaxploitation as evidenced in *Enter the Dragon*, *Shaft*, *Charlie's Angels* and so on?" poses Nina Kristensen, co-founder of Just Add Monsters, the pop culture development house responsible for *Chaos*. "That's the flavor of our game and we really play up the accidental humor of that whole scene! That's why we made sure we got hold of 'Kung Fu Fighting' and *Enter the Dragon* music tracks."

To further arouse the funny bone, the taunts in this fighter aren't mean-faced threats but misconstrued jaberwocky. Listening to the slew of comebacks from the game's super-deformed cast of characters is like hearing Jackie Chan with a New York accent, skipping over adjectives here and mis-tensing a verb there. *Kung Fu Chaos* plays perfectly to the unintentional hilarity of such poorly jacketed Jet Li imports, wherein you're either laughing at the goofy combat styles or crying from the broken English. Each outburst also acts as a power-up device—the more you insult, the more you bruise your opponents with bad-ass specials.

"Another big difference is that our game is played in a true 3D space rather than the 2D plane you get in *Dead or Alive*, *Tekken*, *Virtua Fighter* or *Super Smash Bros.*," Kristensen adds. "In that regard, we're closer to *Powerstone 2* in that we have huge interactive scenes that smash up and collapse around you as you fight. We have developed a multiple-opponent combat system, [wherein] you're fighting a gang of ninjas or up to three other players at the same time. The combat is incredibly easy to get into and deceptively simple to start with, but as you play, you will discover more moves, combos and the subtleties of strategy become more apparent."

But an exclusive wouldn't be that exciting without a few additives particular to the Xbox. Hundreds of taunts are streamed through the console's hard drive while full Dolby 5.1 music consumes your living room; not to mention amazing particle, volumetric fog, bump and fur effects. "The sheer, raw power and sophisticated shaders [of the Xbox] are allowing us to really go to town. After a fight, players can watch a movie-edit of the game that will feature old film screen effects"—an replay filter that was possibly the coolest slice of *Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions*.

There are still many months of production to go, but *Kung Fu Chaos* is definitely prepared to twist the fighting genre by the nipples and laugh with cruel disdain while howling, "You kill my brother. Now you die." Welcome it.

JON M GIBSON

"WE HAVE HUGE INTERACTIVE SCENES THAT SMASH UP AND COLLAPSE..."

These super-deformed characters aren't as passive as they seem

KUNG FU CHAOS | preview

developer: just add monsters | publisher: microsoft | available: summer

There is nothing traditional about this kung fu game—except in the ancient fighting forms, vintage movies and Asian action stars that it sends up in explosive parody. Play with a sense of humor.

HEY RAY!

Rayman and his pals take to racing in one of the best multi-player games ever assembled

. . . Memories, back at Rayman headquarters, mixture of the briefest one the week, creating an arena game made up entirely of pieces from his last adventure. Can it be done? Or better yet, can it be any good? Damn straight, it can. In a stroke of pure genius (and kindness, if you think about it), the engineers at Ubi Soft have decided to make *Rayman's* competition game a Lum-charged arena challenge rather than throw another card racer on the fire. Oh, joy of joys! So, while *Shrek* and *Ant's Life* get the treats of Woody the Woodpecker and the Wii looney tunes with their four-wheeled coffins, *Rayman* is still a happening franchise.

And now I'm going to take you way back . . . if you remember a game from Data East for the Genesis called *Bloody Deprivation*—you win the prize! One of the greatest two-player games, even now. *Half of Rayman Arena* happens to be built on the same premise—only in 3D, with all of the spectacle it brings.

The racing portion of the game features a collection of adorable courses that you traverse in a series of "Can" challenges. You—along with a friend or CPU controlled victim—race through twisted twisting landscapes inspired by *Rayman 2: The Great Escape* (you haven't lived until you've raced a tattooed Globox), each boiling over with platforming goodness. The gist (sorry, no pineapple) is to take the fastest path while, at the same time, making sure to screw things up for the guy behind you as much as possible (without actually reaching over and, like, poking him in the eye) by shooting switches and triggering all manner of *Rayman* enemy goons. With the emphasis placed on dashing, climbing, jumping, shooting, and everything in between, it's like a crash course in platforming—not only do you have to string together moves, but do so in good time. If this doesn't get you going, it's time to hit the rave drugs. I am totally kidding there by the way—if you still can't do 20/20 it's your problem. The other half of *Rayman Arena* consists of arena fighting—grabbing power ups and trying to out shoot and shank your opponent (hey—a simple premise would good by way of the *Rayman* universe). Though it takes a back seat to the racing action (the main draw of the game), it's a nice addition to the arena premise. There were a limited number of GameCube saves available for this preview, so we'll bring you up to speed on the overall length and balance of *Rayman Arena* in our imminent review.

—DAVE HALVERSON

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

RAYMAN ARENA | preview

developer: ubi soft . publisher: ubi soft . available: may

You haven't lived until you've run a tattooed Globox ragged! *Rayman Arena* is impossible to put down, especially playing mutli-player.

PRE-HEATED

The art of the pre-rendered background takes another leap in Capcom's high-powered sequel to their million-selling Onimusha

words peter garden

What a great time to be a gamer. This past month has seen the debut of two of the most incredible looking games ever to grace a home console, and both of them come from Capcom. First we have the game you are reading about now, *Onimusha 2*, and the second is *Biohazard* on GameCube, featured in our **play japan** section (pg.72). Both look light years beyond anything we have seen before, and their combined visual impact is nothing short of astounding.

But really, we would have expected no less. Capcom is the undisputed master of the pre-rendered background, having been toiling away at the art since the first *Resident Evil*. Even so, seeing *Onimusha 2* for the first time is truly awe-inspiring. Remember how good the first *Onimusha* looked? Well, this game makes the original look muddy and lo-res. There is so much detail in the backgrounds here, so many little bits of environment and subtle animation, you almost struggle to take it all in. Some background effects are so slight, they're almost not there, but look closely and you will see tiny rivulets of water, barely visible layers of mist, and a myriad of other details that point to a developer with a great deal of devotion and enthusiasm for the art. And beyond the blink-and-you'll-miss-it subtlety, the obvious graphical flourishes are even more amazing. A particular scene set in the midst of a raging river springs to mind, and you will marvel at the effect. Sure, it's just some deftly processed live-action footage, but that does nothing to deaden the impact of the scene.

Before I get too carried away talking about the look of *Onimusha 2*, I should speak to the actual enhancements to the gameplay, as there are quite a number of them. This is a true sequel in that there is a greater sense of occasion here, as Capcom has simply turned up the wick in every aspect of the game. There are more enemies on-screen, more weapons to wield, and two very substantial changes. One is the addition of the purple orbs, which can briefly turn your character, Yagyu Jubei, into an invincible demon capable of firing streams of energy at his foes. Second is the introduction of helper characters that you will meet throughout the game. By giving them certain items, which can be found or bought, you can entice them to assist you throughout the game. Sometimes they will come to your rescue just as you are about to be killed by a boss, or they may just turn up during particularly crowded fighting sequences. And you even get the chance to play as some of the characters later on in the game, like the gun-toting Magoichi for a bit of the old *Devil May Cry* action.

Make no mistake, *Onimusha 2* is a big and bold sequel, one that is sure to delight lovers of the first game. It certainly looks incredible, and the play is a perfect evolution of the original. Now let's see an English version, and I'll tell you what all the killing is about.

The action is fast and furious in this sequel, offering more of everything that made the first game great

"THIS GAME MAKES THE ORIGINAL *ONIMUSHA* LOOK MUDDY AND LO-RES."

Simple, static scenes in Onimusha 2 are among its most beautiful, but these are nothing without a good sequence of demon burning

PS2

ONIMUSHA 2

preview

developer: capcom publisher: capcom available: now

Capcom are getting rather good at these games. Onimusha 2 sets another graphical high-water mark, and, as before, it plays like a dream.

NOT A BOMB

Flying under the Majesco flag, the timeless hero rides again (insert cheesy bomb cliché here)

Coming exclusively to the GameCube (!) from Majesco, *Bomberman: Generations* is one of, if not the, brightest stars making his way to the Cube this Summer. Like the moderately entertaining N64 versions, *Generations* bolts beyond the mazes, placing our little demolition dude into an action/adventure environment. Bomberman will bang his way across five hubs housing 16 levels each, using the all-to-familiar seasonal guise as a backdrop for the drop-kick-and-kill action. Where the 64 games fell short—mainly the technology—*Generations* beams, with cel-shaded graphics skillfully applied to the lush, dense environments. Of course, all of the B-Man action you'd expect applies: You'll interact with new characters to amass new skills, work closely with Charaboms to devise new techniques, and of course, kick and toss bombs of every shape and size.

The game surrounds the events that transpire when the Hige-Hige Bandits (a pack of aliens bent on the domination of space) hire a team of mercenaries to intercept a Space Freighter on its way to Planet Bomber. The freighter, which is carrying six precious elements that possess an unknown source of energy, gets blowed-up *real* good, and the elements end up scattered all over Planet Tentacle. With the Hige Hige Bandits already deployed and setting traps for Bomberman—the bastards—a race to find the elements ensues. Don't you just love video-game stories? Isn't it whack that Hollywood makes movies out of them? Bottom line—we can already guarantee you that this is the most ass kickin-est game of *Bomberman* you've ever seen or played, and of course, it's stuffed with 2D *Bomberman* fun and mini-games to top off the tank.

DAVE HALVERSON

"WE GUARANTEE YOU THAT THIS IS THE MOST ASS KICKIN-EST GAME OF *BOMBERMAN* YOU'VE EVER SEEN OR PLAYED."

The new generation of *Bomberman* is literally mind-blowing—its packed with plenty of action *and* adventure

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

BOMBERMAN: GENERATIONS | preview

developer: hudson | publisher: majesco | available: may

Majesco has bagged one of gaming's most endearing characters in what will certainly prove to be his best game in the *Bomberman* series - ever

SUMMONER 2

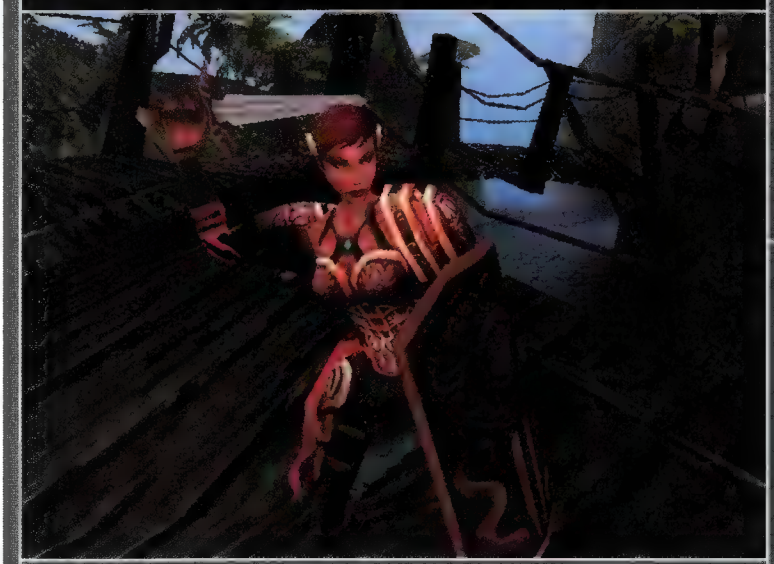
developer: volition publisher: thq available: fall

Here's to the second time being the charm. Developer Volition has apparently taken the many criticisms of the first *Summoner* to heart, laying the groundwork for a sequel that already defies that age-old maxim—this follow-up is going better than the original.

First, the sterile PC-RPG mechanics have been shed for more action-adventure-oriented play (no more run-of-the-mill, *Everquest*-style scenarios). Gameplay, which occurs in over 30 unique environments, from the tropical isle of Teomura to the fantastical City of Masks, are host to an all-new, party-driven combat system. With the update, you control up to three characters simultaneously, constructing your band of shape-shifting, spell-casting, monster-slaying heroes from eight uniquely modeled daydream warriors. Customize their abilities with a nifty skill-point log; then toss them into the trippy worlds of this second installment, which have been dipped in a vat of Terry Gilliam Brand liquor—the oddly attractive, brightly-colored, bizarrely tantalizing kind—so expect an experience unlike that of traditional games in the genre.

As for the ever-important storyline, here's a brief run-down: You are the Queen of Halassar. The King of Galdyr plots your murder. The armies of Urath wander your kingdom's property line (with no intention of making a legit real estate transaction). And below Munari City, the mysterious Unseen design a dire blueprint for your demise. So using the "language of gods," you must transform into twelve awe-inspiring beings, from the Blood Juggernaut to the Blade of Sand—and this time around, characters fully cultivate into the powerful summons. And expect it all in a nicely woven 3D landscape with plenty of other enhancements—Volition has had two years up since the original's PS2 launch release. Part deux has the second-gen advantage—that's reason enough to breathe.

MICHAEL EISENBERG



THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

developer: universal interactive publisher: universal interactive available: oct

Coming to the Xbox this holiday season following the mildly successful film, JRR Tolkien's novel will segue into the realm of gaming with *The Fellowship of the Ring* an action adventure following the exploits of, Gandalf and Aragon, as they emerge from the Shire to traverse the treachery of Mordor. Besides the usual bliss (minion upon minion of diverse enemies, snarling bosses and the like) of a long fantastical quest, backed by a massive budget, players will delve into non-combative elements like lock picking, trapping stealth, Ring Distraction, and spell creation. And since it's Xbox look for OT3 lighting (that's real good lighting to you and me), dynamic shadows, volumetric fog and stunningly textured Middle earth environments. This one is going to be big.

SHANE REED

SAVAGE SKIES

developer: irock interactive publisher: bam! entertainment available: now

When first introduced last year, *Savage Skies* had Ozzy Osbourne's name attached to it and was to be the first in developer iRock's line of game/music tie-ins. Now, several months later, the Ozzman is gone and has taken the game's high profile with him. Fortunately, that shouldn't affect gameplay any, which, by the way, is creature-based flying action. Dragons, and other such mythical beasts, will be available to guide players through the game's three unique campaigns and almost 30 levels. Since each creature is different, discovering which one is best suited to the mission at hand should provide some much needed depth and complexity to an otherwise straightforward task. But even if *Savage Skies* ends up better than its competition, *Drakan* and *Dragon Rage*, the question still remains: Without Ozzy, will anyone care?

NICK MARRONI

POW

developer: wide games publisher: codemasters available: spring

1941. You've been captured by German soldiers and are held captive in a POW camp. As an Allied officer, your daily life is now dedicated to avoiding the prison's massive spotlights, using precision stealth to sneak past guards, and, at all costs, cover your scent so the rabies-foaming Dobermans don't catch wind—all in the name of tracking down the camp's blueprints to aid you in your escape. After each successful runaway—by way of impersonating a German guard or using mass-explosives, among others—you'll be upgraded to a higher security prison (there's four realistic camps in total, Salonika, Stalag Luft I, Stalag Luft III and Colditz Castle). Plenty of opposition exists, too, in form of an advanced AI system, as well as two unique modes of play: "Escape," which is story-driven, and "Blitz," a rush-to-breakout, speed-based mode.

ET COHEN

JURASSIC PARK: PROJECT GENESIS

developer: blue tongue publisher: universal available: q4

Reaching beyond the usual snooze fest associated with "world-builder" games *Jurassic Park: Project Genesis* promises to up the anty—and the body count—as you battle in 12 missions in against the forces of nature and, of course, flesh-eating dinosaurs. The world-builder contingent is safe however, as the game also allows you to design and manage the most amazing dinosaur theme park in the world! Of course it's also the only dinosaur theme park in the world—"Spared no expense." Wake me up when the raptors attack.

DAVE HALVERSON

WAY OF THE SAMURAI

developer: spike/acquire publisher: bam! entertainment available: spring

Borrowing elements of *Kengo* and *Onimusha*, *Way of the Samurai* looks to give players the chance to experience an exciting and deep action-adventure, being the tale of a wandering samurai caught up in a Japanese power struggle, forced to see the conflict through to the end. Thanks to a non-linear plot, though, players will be able to choose whom they befriend and whom they will make enemies of. Combat is primarily sword-based and is more of a focused one-on-one affair than a chaotic free-for-all. With the inclusion of 40 unique swords and 200 distinct attacks and moves, things should remain fresh throughout the adventure. Though, how deep or shallow the combat system ends up will ultimately determine the fate of this title. If everything comes together and the developers' ambitious goals are realized, this should be something to look forward to—just don't expect any Ghost Dogs

NICK MARRONI

CHASE

developer: i-imagine publisher: bam! entertainment available: summer

Riding on the coattails of the forthcoming *Stuntman*, *Chase* is the inevitable copycat that comes with every new and original concept in gaming. Just as in *Stuntman*, *Chase* puts you in the shoes of a Hollywood stunt driver that does the stuff that the Schwarzeneggers and Stallones of the film industry can't. The four movie sets that form the backdrops for the action are: an Asian City, a Post Apocalyptic landscape, a 1920's Gangster downtown arena, and a Spy Thriller. Old-style automobiles, semi-trucks, motorcycles, sports cars, dune buggies, and even a three-wheeled tuk-tuk (obviously a foreign ride), will be available for players to pilot through the movie scenes. Though this isn't the most original idea, as long as *Chase* doesn't play *The Simpsons' Road Rage* to *Stuntman*'s *Crazy Taxi*, things should be okay.

NICK MARRONI

SLEEPING GIANT

Nintendo gets ready to butt-bounce the competition

"WHAT'S COMING IS A HANDFUL OF GAMES THAT WILL CHANGE THE COURSE OF HUMANKIND FOREVER."

(top row) mario sunshine
(middle row) mario golf, star fox adventures, metroid prime
(bottom row) mario tennis

While we are guilty of stating the obvious—that so far the GameCube is home to far too many ports—make no mistake, we pledge our allegiance to the brand. Those countless hours hammering away at *Metroid*, and everything RARE and Miyamoto have ever done, are etched into our psyches like Britney's belly and boobs. And while they're quality over quantity speech given at last year's E3 press conference has obviously gone out the window, for necessity's sake, there's no mistake that what's coming is a handful of games that will likely change the course of humankind forever. *Mario Sunshine*, the new *Zelda*, *F-Zero*, *Metroid Prime* (cross every digit you've got), *Star Fox Adventures*, *Mario Golf*, *Mario Tennis*, and with any luck, another *Donkey Kong*, are enough to make any gamer sell his soul. As a "non-mainstream" publication, we're not even on Nintendo's radar, limited instead to table scraps and recycled screens, and we're still in the front row of the cheering section. Imagine if they liked us, the coverage we would bring! A scary proposition!

DAVE HALVERSON

KUNG FU FIGHTING

**Wanna' be like Bruce?
Here's your chance.**

words tom bramwell

A wise man once said, "*They were funky China men from funky Chinatown, they were chopping them up and chopping them down, it's an ancient Chinese art and everybody knew their part, from a fainting to a slip and kicking from the hip.*"

Ancient proverb? Keep guessing.

Words from a stale fortune cookie? Eh…no.

Of course, these are the immortal words of Carl Douglas from his hit song *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting*. For this preview, we thought it befitting to put you in the mood.

So if you could name the most bad ass martial artist of all time, who would it be? Jet Li? Jackie Chan? Dragon Lee? Ralph Macchio? (Okay, okay, so maybe not Ralph Macchio.) *We* can only think of one—Bruce Lee. Through his movies and his teachings, his legend will live on forever—but now you can pick up a controller and slide into his…er…bare feet.

"*Quest of the Dragon* has been in development for almost two years," explains Jonathan Eubanks, Senior Producer at Universal Interactive. "The development team at Ronin Entertainment have meticulously recreated a variety of martial arts moves as well as including Lee's own discipline, Jeet Kune Do."

The game has players engaged in an epic story line where Lee gets called back to duty to aid in the investigation of the mysterious Black Lotus criminal organization. Somehow, the Black Lotus is linked to Lee's father's disappearance and the destruction of Lee's monastery. Throw in some international weapons smuggling and secret drug research and you have the makings of a Bruce Lee adventure. In addition, Lee has to find and recover the mystical Golden Relic, a keeper of ancient martial arts secrets. "There is enough gameplay to keep even the most seasoned gamer busy," continues Eubanks. "There are over 30-plus levels, spanning three continents—Hong Kong, England and San Francisco. There are numerous boss fights, as well as some cool secrets that become available to the player later on in the game."

As one would expect, the heart and soul of any Bruce Lee game—or any Bruce Lee product, for that matter—is the hand-to-hand combat. "There are over 120 authentic moves in the game," continues Eubanks. "What made Lee's style so unique was how simple it was. He didn't do flips in the air or fancy hand techniques—just basic punches and kicks. It was his intensity and speed that made the difference."

In game, players have access to a punch, kick and special attack button; although you can't execute a specific move at any given time (i.e. you can't spin kick on cue). Through a succession of button presses, players will be able to link together various fighting moves when clashing with opponents—complicated, indeed. There is also a unique Move Upgrade System implemented in the game, allowing players to defeat enemies, pick up tokens they drop (yeah, we know, enemies in games are dropping coins all the time—fix those pocket holes, guys), and purchase new moves and special power-ups (including increased health, faster attacks, and more). "We haven't nailed down the final list of power-ups and special attacks," says Eubanks, "but it will definitely keep the gameplay fresh and unique."

Though, fighting game purists may find the control scheme somewhat limiting, but this isn't a true fighting game. But after playing an early

version, there is still plenty of fist-flinging and feet-flying to be had—just don't expect *Tekken*-style engine. We can only hope the fighting mechanics will be tweaked a *lot* more.

But at this stage, the visuals in *Quest of the Dragon* are its strongest asset. Players are treated to lush, dynamic environments—complete with waterfalls and swaying trees—truly beautiful backdrops for oriental action. Lee's animations are top notch, too. "We motion captured Bruce Lee's last student," explains Eubanks. "You can truly see the influence of Bruce in his moves, which, in turn, got translated into the game." And, yes, boys and girls, you get to play with nunchakus.

WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!

"WE MOTION-CAPTURED BRUCE LEE'S LAST STUDENT. THERE ARE OVER 120 AUTHENTIC MOVES IN THE GAME."

XBOX

BRUCE LEE: QUEST OF THE DRAGON

preview

developer ronin entertainment | publisher universal interactive | available july

Ronin has crafted a game that defies the expectations of most—it's not exactly *Double Dragon* or *Tekken*. But how early hands-on preview does prove that Bruce Lee is [illegible]

PLAY THING

Enter the world of John Carpenter's eerie, tension-dripping horrorshow—only, this is the interactive prequel

words tom ham

Gamers like to play scary games. Whether on the PC or console, players can't seem to get enough horror in their gameplay. You can hear it in their voice when they describe how they got so scared they nearly wet themselves. Or how a particular scene in a game made them have nightmares. If you've ever played a scary game before, you know exactly what we're talking about. And with games like *Half-Life*, *Silent Hill*, *Fatal Frame* and, of course, the *Resident Evil* series, continuing to be successful, there is no doubt the horror genre is here to stay—and we couldn't be happier.

So what's next? Where do we go from here? Wait for the next *Resident Evil*? Hardly. The next extension of *Silent Hill*? Nah. We want something new and fresh—something that will take the survival horror genre to the next level and make us sleep with the lights on.

Considered a newbie to the industry (with only a few titles under their belt) Universal Interactive is going to be publishing one of the most ambitious survival horror games to date. Not only will it appeal to gamers, but to movie fans as well. Ladies and Gentlemen, we introduce you to *The Thing*.

It's a sequel to John Carpenter's classic horror film of the same name, taking place shortly after the events from the 1982 movie. A division of Gen Inc. goes to the Alien Ship crash site to begin excavations and their investigations. Once on board, they discover a research lab where the Gen Inc. scientists soon discover a liquid that has some "unique characteristics." Colonial Whitely, a veteran US Solider who is charge of the facility begins to show signs of terminal illness. Some even say he's not quite the same. Before long, communication with the group and Colonial Whitely is cut off. A military taskforce is sent in to investigate. Players take on the role of Captain Blake, the soldier who is in charge of the taskforce. The squad is dropped off at the ship by plane,

Feel the fear: *The Thing* is an exercise in true horror. Just admire the sites.

which is scheduled to pick them up in three days. After they arrive, they encounter an unspeakable horror. Players must find a way to destroy the infection and stop Colonial Whitely before the plane arrives.

"What's unique about *The Thing*," explains Chris Hadley, Senior Producer at Computer Artworks, "is how important the NPCs are in the game. How you the player interacts with various NPCs in the game will determine their psychological state. Will they help you? Or will they be afraid of you? Or will they come after you?" If you remember in the movie, it was basically a chess match between everyone—trying to figure out who was infected and how do you get them to reveal themselves. One would think incorporating that into gameplay would be a difficult task. Utilizing a simple and intuitive interface, we were able to interact with the various characters rather easily."

Unlike *Resident Evil*, where you run around with a plethora of weapons, solve a few puzzles and kill everything in sight (well, sort of), in *The Thing*, you have to interact with your NPCs in a way that you not only get what you need done (i.e. fixing something), but you're also gaining their trust and support. Adding to the suspense of the game is the fact that at any given moment, one of your NPCs can burst into an alien life form and start attacking you. In addition to trust, the NPCs also exhibit fear. So how can you tell if an NPC is scared of you or a situation? "He'll get sick, he'll pace back and forth, he'll throw up," explains Hadley, "and our favorite: He'll even wet himself."

Gameplay will span 10 levels, plus a number of sub-levels. "The story gets told by your interactions with the over 25 NPCs," says Hadley, "as well as the 50 or so cinematics we've put into the game. We wanted to maintain the feel and vibe of the original movie. This *is* the sequel, after all."

Both versions—PS2 and Xbox—show off incredible real-time dynamic lighting effects and gameplay running around 60fps. The animations are incredibly realistic and the textures are ultra rich and full of depth and detail. The dark, foreboding atmosphere of the movie was perfectly conveyed in the gameplay. Players will be treated to incredible looking monsters, creatures and, of course, lots and lots of blood—which is always a good thing.

Without question, Computer Artworks and Universal Interactive have a lot to live up to. Games based on movies (or inspired by them) haven't had the best of luck in the industry and *The Thing* is not your everyday horror movie—so you realize the importance of this title. But after checking out the game firsthand, we think the survival horror genre has finally reached the next level.

"AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT, ONE OF YOUR NPCs CAN BURST INTO AN ALIEN LIFE FORM AND START ATTACKING YOU."

PS2 XBOX

THE THING — preview

developer: computer artworks | publisher: universal interactive | available: august (ps2), october (xbox)

Computer Artworks has tapped into every facet that made John Carpenter's classic creepy—let's hope it translates well.

FORCE FEEDBACK

Another quality Star Wars shooter enters our air space. Is Jedi Starfighter the best one ever?

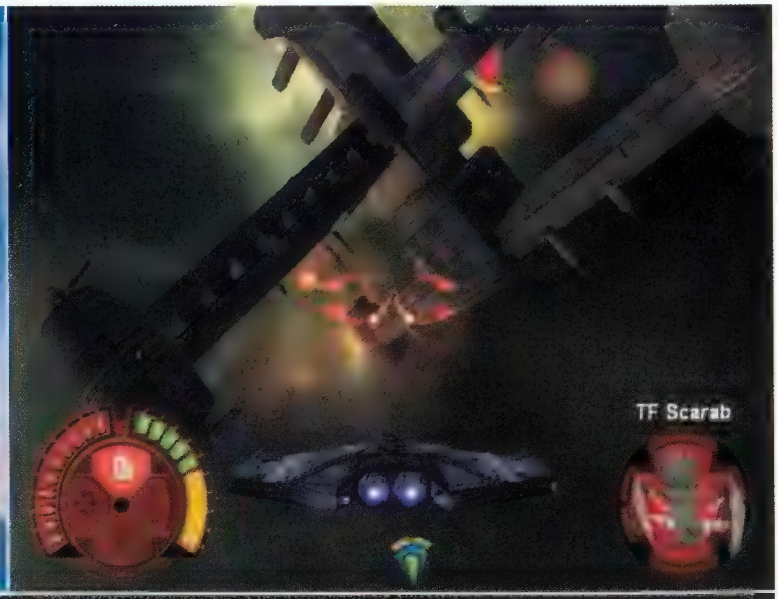
words dave halverson

I stand alone as the only editor on Earth who didn't gush over *Rogue Leader*. I liked it, but I didn't love it. This game, *Jedi Starfighter*, I love (well, as much as one can love a *Star Wars* shooter). Investigating disturbances in the lush Karthakk system, the missions are clear-cut and better structured than Rogue Leaders, and thanks to plenty of topographic ambience—drop dead gorgeous to behold. Playing this game finally got me pumped for *Episode II*. The vessels in *JS* are galaxies better then in previous flights (Nym's Havoc so reminds me of Truxton) and the overall universe, I'd say, is the best the series has rendered thus far.

Besides the allure of *Episode II*, I also found solace in the game's *Star Fox*-reminiscent Wingmate Commands (although, I miss the cool jibidy-jaba lingo) and the character's plight struck me as much more fascinating than the usual white bread "roger that" fare this series usually spews. Playing as Adi Gallia and Nym (you switch between the two as necessary), the banter between them is actually worth listening to, and the situations they encounter are the most interactive so far in the annals of *Star Wars* shooters.

Housed within a framework that strikes a balance between *Colony Wars* and *Warhawk*, even the arsenal has taken on a new rub—via the advent of Force Power. By holding down the circle button, you coalesce Force particles to ultimately achieve Force clarity and unleash devastating attacks and/or fortified defenses. Each Force Power—Shield, Lightning, Reflex, and Shock Wave—have three states: Connect, Clarity and Disconnect. Once you dial in the timing and different properties of each, the game becomes an exercise in pilot savvy and further bathes you in the euphoric *Star Wars* vibe. You'll also find that the Wingmates in this game effect the outcome of the missions to a greater degree, depending on the mission and how you deploy them—in terms of A.I., *JS* shines brightly.

All I know is that I'm usually the last guy in line for mission-based fighters (I'll take a new Darius or R-Type any day), especially when based on *Star Wars* (how many horses have to die?!). But I finally found one that I truly enjoy. I hope this doesn't mean I need to learn what a Jinkin is.



Looks like it's time to make a deposit. Blow the doors and make for the open sea.

Real-time cinemas frame the action convincingly.

"THE VESSELS IN *JEDI STARFIGHTER* ARE GALAXIES BETTER THAN IN PREVIOUS FLIGHTS...THE BEST THE SERIES HAS RENDERED THUS FAR."

PS2

JEDI STARFIGHTER

play rating ●●●●●

developer: lucas arts publisher: lucas arts available: now

Finally, the PS2 gets a *Star Wars* shooter to rival *Rogue Leader*. This may be the best *Star Wars* shooter to date.

PEOPLE FOOD

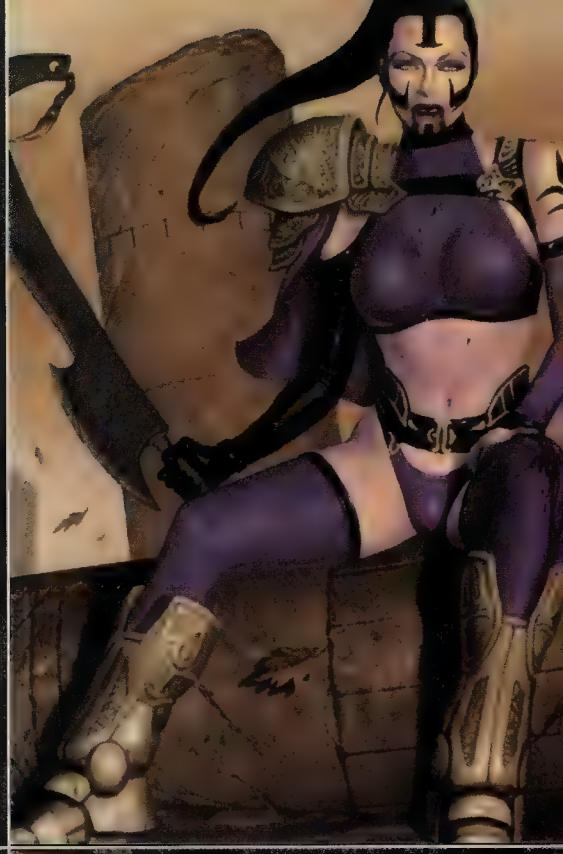
Kain wakes up, hungry to a world he doesn't control... yet

words dave halverson

It's easy these days to take a game like *Blood Omen 2* for granted. To dwell too much on inconsequential flaws, like fallen enemies that melt into walls and small hitches in the characters animations, and not enough on a level of A.I. and grandeur unimaginable just a few short years ago. Such diminutive distractions are especially evident in games that manifest a desire to become convinced of the world you're in—much like *Metal Gear* did—where you dread even the slightest hitch creeping in to remind you that the characters you're fixated on are polygonal puppets on a programmers string. We should be awestruck at the prospect of being temporarily relieved of our daily routines—transported to a time when vampires struggled for survival in a world controlled by the very deity responsible for the curse set upon them—in which they are forced to feed on humans for survival.

Having lay dormant for 200 years, the once mighty vampire lord Kain is resurrected, only to find the world he once knew and ruled, a distant memory. If he is to regain the Soul Reaver and reign over Nosgoth again, he must fight his instincts, and work together with a small vampire resistance to strategically break the back of their oppressors, the Sarafan. Kain is lead to the Cabal by a new player in the Legacy—Uma—a sexy vampiress whom with any luck will become the subject of the next chapter in the Blood Omen saga.

The gameplay in *BO2* stands front and center as its main draw. Reaching far beyond the realm of hack 'n' slash Crystal Dynamics has given each massive chapter a unique feel all its own by ordaining Kain with abilities from each renegade vampire he defeats. Mist (available from the outset) enables Kain to become transparent in mist, sneak up behind his prey and do ungodly things—from driving daggers through their brains to cutting off their heads. After Mist comes Jump, the games most pleasing attribute. Targeting this maneuver, Kain can spring across large chasms or attack his enemies from great distances, and does so in a silent, vampiric manner befitting his evil nature. Charm—a form of mind control—enables Kain to posses the week minded to open his way, and Telekinesis grants him a psychic force, capable of effecting far away objects. The other Dark Gifts Crystal D has bestowed on Kain add new dimension to the tried-and-true, lock-on fighting dynamic. Berserk, Fury, and Immolate all boil in a gauge (built by blocking) and when unleashed will send most opponents to there grave with one hit. All of the adversaries in *BO2* have distinct characteristics, and if taken lightly can kill Kain quite easily. Kain's tools of destruction, which he conveniently steals from corpses, range from spiked clubs to Cloud Strife sized swords. They take damage, can break, and don't carry over—another aspect of the game that keeps you guessing. If you break a sword and only weak enemies are about, you're left to your fighting skills using only Kain's claws. As for Kain himself, his running animation is a tad athletic for my taste, but his jump and silent descent balance the scale—for the record I'd have liked a quick turn as well. The model is lean and mean with nary a visible seam, and it changes four times within the game (!) shifting from his traditional wardrobe to a sort



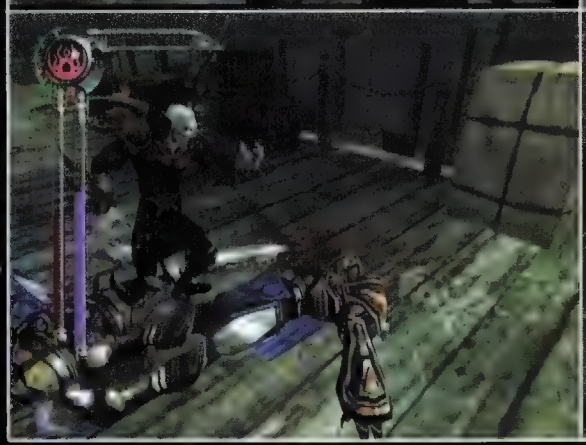
of Kain of Arabia look all the way to a spiny decorative armor that makes him look decidedly omnipotent wicked chic. Once fallen, Kain draws blood from his victims the old fashioned way; by sucking it in a stream through the air.

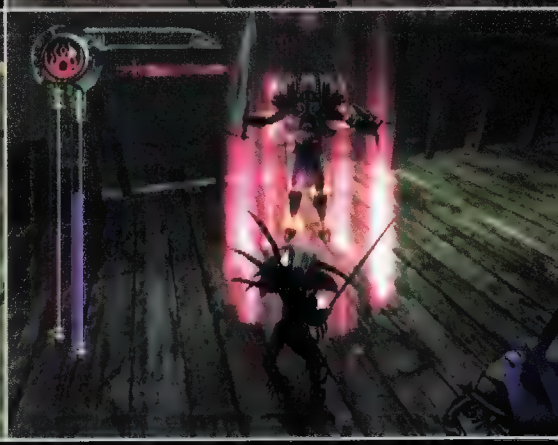
The overall look of the game is quite astounding, especially on Xbox. Where the PS2 version suffers from an erratic frame-rate and some muddy textures, the Xbox game sparkles with high-resolution visuals and a solid 60fps. The architecture is mostly gothic, but spills over nicely into some Gieger-esque and even Syd Mead like overtones. Much care was taken creating the Kain universe, Crystal D deserves high accolades for there commitment to the overall integrity of this massive gamescape.

The one aspect of the game that does come under question (although it's executed as well as it can be) is the amount of box puzzles and lever pulling Kain must endure to facilitate the games progression. One has to question an architect who would place a lever down the hall from a simple door rather than just install a lock, or locate a switch to open a gate in a sewer that you must slide a box over to trigger. Sure, it's a video game, but I think these archaic devices as a means to an end have run their course. Kain doesn't box it up nearly as much as Raziel but it's still enough to raise a brow. The games other puzzle element—a vast network of plumbing powered by Glyph energy—is much more compelling. The boss fights, divided into three phases, are also well devised. In the end, which is what this is, with its intelligently told story, *Dark City* meets *Nosgoth* character designs, horrific ambience, massive depth, and good ending (!), *BO2* is a must-play game, and a title befitting its noble bloodline.

"THE OVERALL LOOK OF THE GAME IS QUITE ASTOUNDING"

Kain drains his victims as he did in his first game—no muss, no fuss.



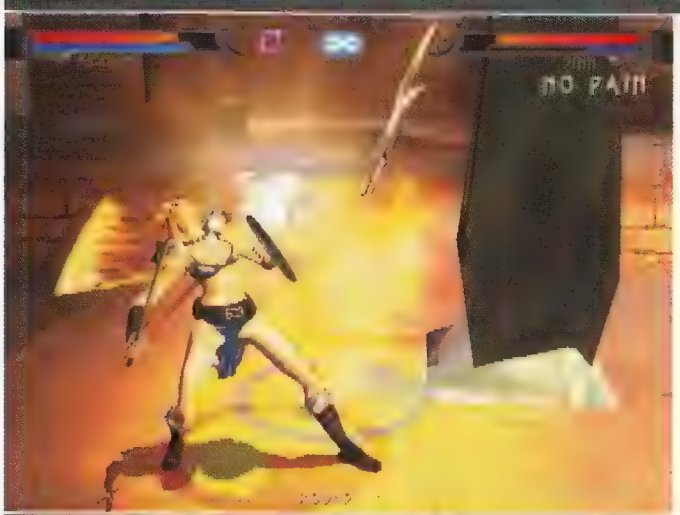


Kain uses Immolate on a Sarafan guard. Once initiated, death is quick and imminent.

GETTING MEDIEVAL

This! new fighting franchise gets off to a reasonable start.

words dave halverson



Hopefully you weren't too excited about *Barbarian*'s much hyped role playing elements, but rather, intrigued at the prospect of a sturdy arena fighter for the PS2–something it surprisingly doesn't yet have. What Titus should be selling are these characters, and this universe, but more on that later. First I'll commence with the role playing component.

Basically, you build your character the old fashioned way (a la *Baldur's Gate* and many others) by adding notches to a gauge after each victory, upping your speed, defense, magic power, strength, or regenerative properties as you see fit. Simple and effective enough I suppose, but certainly nothing new. Then there's the story…telling. Each character is accompanied by a complex story line; the naked (!) Hellspawn Jin, has risen from the fiery depths to become mortal; the beautiful Princess Keela fights to avenge her murdered father; and the amply breasted Eyara fights to protect the forest. Each of the 10 characters play a pivotal role in the plight of Barbaria, a land tattered and torn by our humble narrator… Indeed, story elements are a good idea in this context, if only they were acted out via real time cinema (Lord knows these models are more than up to the task). But alas, they are spoken, and by the very Deity they battle no less…Frasier Crane. Frasier Crane!? Well, not really, but this big bad demon sounds so much like the good doctor at times, I was looking for demon Niles to appear. So much for the RPG elements – lets fight!

At its core, *Barbarian* is a near great arena fighter with combatants that rank among the best American character designs I have ever seen. The models are absolutely gorgeous—nearly seamless beings, they're a joy to behold and control. The moves—a simplistic array of combos executed by square/triangle button combinations—are dispersed with the vigor of flaming missiles, but only count for a fraction of the game's action. R1 dispenses magic, L1 blocks, and you can run and jump—with how fast and high depending on your class and upgrades – those RPG elements actually do work. A nimble, quick opponent is best served by keeping a safe distance and chipping away, while larger characters capable of lifting large objects and doing big damage up-close are better served holding there ground. Again, nothing new—but there's more still. The game presents unique scenarios within each quest: you may find yourself poisoned—forced to win before you die—or your foe, temporarily invincible. There are instances where the first fighter to score 50 hits wins, and the undead it turns out, like to invite weaker demon minions to the fray just to piss you off. It all depends on who and where you are. In all, the game offers a variety of landscapes and battle types that will keep you guessing until the very end each time you play. The environments themselves, many of which break away and fall into others, border on spectacular, the high point being a rocky beach with waves crashing on the rocks. *Barbarian* is infinitely easy on the eyes making long bouts of versus play a big attraction.

Barbarian wasn't all that I expected it to be, in terms of intelligent in-game evolution, but it delivers a lot of freshness never the less. Most importantly, it introduces a world and characters that warrant a sequel—a chance for these talented designers to fully realize their vision and render out the games lengthy intermissions. If this goes down, Titus might just have a fighting franchise on there hands, and we all know what that can lead to these days. I'll be first in line for the Jin, Keela, Eyara, and Phade figures.

"THE MODELS ARE ABSOLUTELY GORGEOUS, NEARLY SEEMLESS BEINGS, THEY'RE A JOY TO BEHOLD AND CONTROL"

PS2

BARBARIAN

developer: saffire publisher: titus available: now

play rating

Barbarian's RPG elements don't turn out as expected, but the beautiful character models, amazingly rendered environments, and solid battle system make it a formidable arena fighter.

SUPER SPY

Acclaim's new futuristic thriller may be the birth of a promising new franchise

words dave halverson

Global warming, bio-chip implants, and compulsory organ donation are commonplace in the not-so-distant future world of *Headhunter*. Unfortunately, grating sensationalist newscasts have survived, too. You play the role of Jack Wade, a master headhunter whom awakens in a Recall-like lab to discover he's been royally messed with. Stripped of his super cop status, he takes his retrograde amnesia on the road, investigating the murder of the man responsible for the current justice system, Christopher Stern. His hottie of a daughter puts a rice burner between your legs and sends you on your way, deep into a complex web of organized crime and corporate debauchery that makes Enron look like The Disney Store.

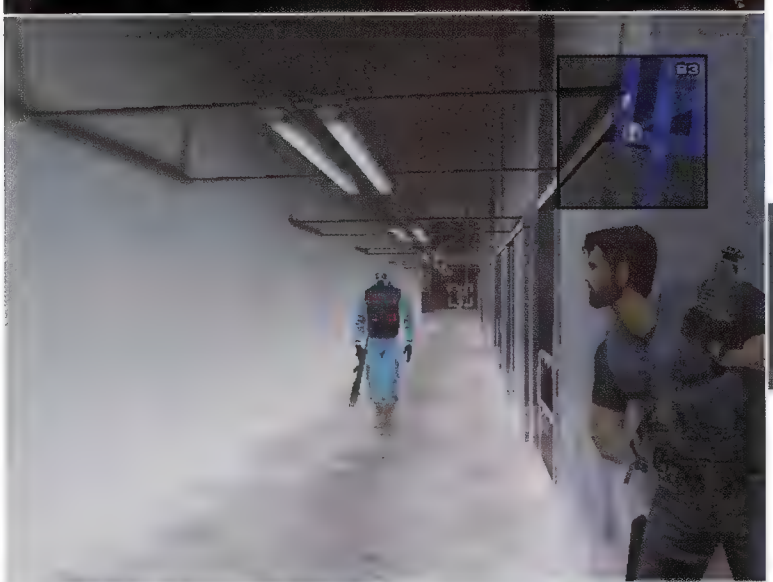
The headhunter's world revolves around LEILA, a sort of DMV for bounty hunters (complete with the witch behind the counter). The better the bust, the more LEILA props you're awarded. Returning to LEILA after each mission, Jack can take VR tests (reminiscent of *Metal Gear VR Missions*, save the motorcycle tests) to upgrade your license from C on up. The higher the license, the higher the security clearance and hardware available—so the bigger and better the cases. But Jack's fixated on one; and the implications run deep.

At it's core, *Headhunter* is a *Dirty Harry*-meets-*Robocop* version of *Metal Gear*—and don't kill me for saying so—but at times it beats *MGS* at its own game. The game draws great diversity from the LEILA missions and racing around the city on your bike to each specific location. There's also a level of interactivity beyond the usual form of intel (in this case, a Casio Visual Manager) where you interact with Angela Stern via real-time cinemas. The missions themselves are the stuff of gaming legend; rooftop assaults in the pouring rain, bomb detonations that re-configure whole areas, hostage situations, combing vast sewer networks, etc. Arriving at the scene of a crime, Jack may find dead bodies strewn about—their still fresh blood splattered on the walls behind them—and worse, he's almost always expected. The areas are detailed down to the pencil shavings. You'll find offices, bathrooms, lockers, convenience stores, sewers, shopping malls, warehouses and fortresses, all

ultra-realistic, in fact, these may be the most realistic real-time real-world environments seen to date.

Outfitted for the job, Jack has all of Snake's tricks (only with a better interface) and he plays the stealth game masterfully, flicking spent bullet shells to detract the enemies attention just long enough to break their necks for example. The missions range in size and scope, and for the first time, getting there is half the fun. There's a bit of clipping in the big city, but overall the scope of the environments come through beautifully along with the feeling of total immersion afforded by having a bike to race around town on.

Headhunter is intelligently laid out, well scripted and acted, and exhibits a level of polish achieved through many years of development. Here's the sleeper hit of the season going into the Summer. Whether Sega has out *Metal Gear*-ed Konami remains to be seen, I know I like this game better, but don't expect that sentiment to be too widespread. They've taken the framework and built a post *Demolition Man* sci-fi epic on it, but the characters and situations are such a departure that the two games can co-exist beautifully. Acclaim is putting its muscle behind *Turok* and *Vexx* right now anyway, so I wouldn't think *Headhunter 2* is even on the drawing board. I don't think Acclaim have any idea what they have on there hands, otherwise they'd be touting this as the next best thing to *MGS*, which may just be the understatement of the year.



"HERE'S THE SLEEPER HIT OF THE SEASON."

Getting there may be half the fun, but once you do, take cover

Wait 'til his back is turned and snap his neck, or come out firing.

PS2

HEADHUNTER

developer: sega/amuze publisher: acclaim available: now

I didn't know what to expect from *Headhunter* after the Dreamcast said goodbye, but I'm glad Sega stuck with it. I hope there's more where this came from.

NEO-GUNSLINGER

Empire enters light-gun turf with Endgame, a new futuristic breed of shooter

It ain't *Hamlet*, but *Endgame* definitely draws inspiration from the Bard. This frantic light-gun shooter is actually a "game within a game," wherein the retro-fitted Jade, a would-be fashion designer, has quite a tight grip on her GunCon 2. But when she happens upon another local in London, the insatiable Tyler—who is involved in a virtual reality project dubbed EuroDream—things get a little tricky.

That's where you, the fearless techno gunslinger, draw help from that rarely used, dust-covered peripheral lying forgotten next to your Dreamcast's broadband adapter. As EuroDream troopers charge into Jade's apartment—while she tears through a level of *Mighty Joe Jupiter* on her living room set—the action shifts into an all-out war of electronic bullets. Gradually, you'll make progress toward a Shakespearean climax (well, sort of) through 20 worldwide locales and seven shifty bosses. All in all, everything plays out like any admirable foe to *Time Crisis* should—that is, until you consider the new wave of innovation that developer Cunning has secured as "bonus" material.

Firstly, *Mighty Joe Jupiter*, Jade's pet shooter, is actually playable as a 10-level training mode. Blasting through aliens while you learn the ropes as a futuristic gunslinger—it's not an all-out challenge, but there definitely is some intrinsic value in this game within a game, within…er…a game. But Cunning, a programming house previously known only for their PC pinball efforts, ups the ante with several other options (adding plenty of merit to their resume, too). One particularly close to my arcade habits is the dual-gun feature, allowing a lone player to tease the trigger on two GunCons (or, of course, you could invite a friend to cover your back). Then "Mirror" mode shakes up the genre even more, running each level in reverse, allowing gunners to attack opponents from the opposite side. The "Arcade" mode offers five extra weapons that the "Story" mode doesn't contain—plus, it's a timed, point-based system (head shots are key; arm or leg frags are frowned upon). And if you think your trigger finger is sequentially quicker than the opposing EuroDream agents, try the "Hyper" method on for size. Bullets fly faster; and blood sheds at breakneck speed.

Some keen enemy A.I., responding actively to your playing habits, pose even more of a threat. So tread lightly—this is a light-gun shooter with hip British wit and intense, frenetic energy. Arcade purists have a new heaven.

JON M GIBSON

The action of *Endgame* is frantic and fun—aim wisely

"...A LIGHT-GUN SHOOTER WITH A HIP BRITISH WIT AND INTENSE, FRENETIC ENERGY."

PS2

ENDGAME | preview

developer: cunning | publisher: empire interactive | available: may

It's a rarity that the GunCon in your closet is actually plugged in these days—although, it's always been that way. So it's quite refreshing to see a new entrant in the gun-slinging parade.

SPEED FREAKS

Titus' new arcade-style racer delivers on all counts—it's a smashing drive

"TITUS HAS DONE DOWNFORCE RIGHT ON PRETTY MUCH EVERY LEVEL."

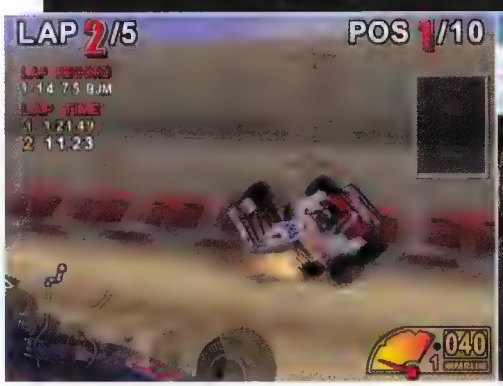
The crashes are spectacular but don't set you back in the pack accordingly—so enjoy the show.

Not so long ago, arcade-style racers became passé with the influx of *Gran Turismo* and a slew of realistic simulations that followed. While they posed an insurmountable level of competition for the straight racer for a spell, with so many flooding the market the way has become clear for an old school racer to emerge, provided it has all of the necessary ingredients, which Titus' *Downforce* most definitely does.

In the grand scheme of video-game racing, I thought I'd discovered nirvana at several junctures: through the Atari 5200's *Pole Position*, the TurboGrafx' *Final Lap Twin* and *Monaco GP*, and *Virtua Racing* on Genesis—when I set eyes on *Wipeout* and *Motor Toon* for the PlayStation, I threw a rod. But I haven't really embraced an arcade style racer since—until now. Amidst cars that scream like the banshees they are, hard-driving techno, and some of the most spectacular crashes you'll ever see, Titus has done *Downforce* right on pretty much every level. The busy, colorful yet squeaky-clean visuals cling to 60fps 99-percent of the time with far-off horizons that never clip. But more importantly, the racing is skillfully balanced with an emphasis on racing prowess. While it's not a sim, it's not sloppy or ill-conceived either. There are no checkpoints or bullshit time milestones to achieve and no boosts to collect—it's just about knowing the course and racing like a demon gaming, pure and simple. And no matter how zoned you are, a quick look back and second place will always be on your ass. I also really like the personality afforded by assigning the game characters—similar to the original *Wipeout* and *F-Zero*—an element I've always felt added an extra air of interaction to the competitive nature of racing games.

Cosmetically, the game delivers a unique look all its own with new twists on realistic venues. The shimmering cel-shaded cars look brilliant and the numerous tracks (often with laps exceeding the two minutes mark—which I love) each come alive with brilliant skies, city lights, lens flares and a host of stunning architecture from massive suspension bridges to sheer cliffs and beachfront property. The camera affords four views of the action to suit every taste and the music is always suited to the flow of the game. *Downforce* is an essential racing purchase for speed freaks.

DAVE HALVERSON



PS2

DOWNFORCE

play rating ●●●●●

developer: titus publisher: titus available: now

If you're looking for a pure racing experience, you can't go wrong with *Downforce*. 60 frames, 20-plus courses, multi-player and kickin' tunes—it's all here.

C&C GOES 3D

words jason harper

Westwood Studios birngs their excellent Command & Conquer series to the violent world of first-person shooters

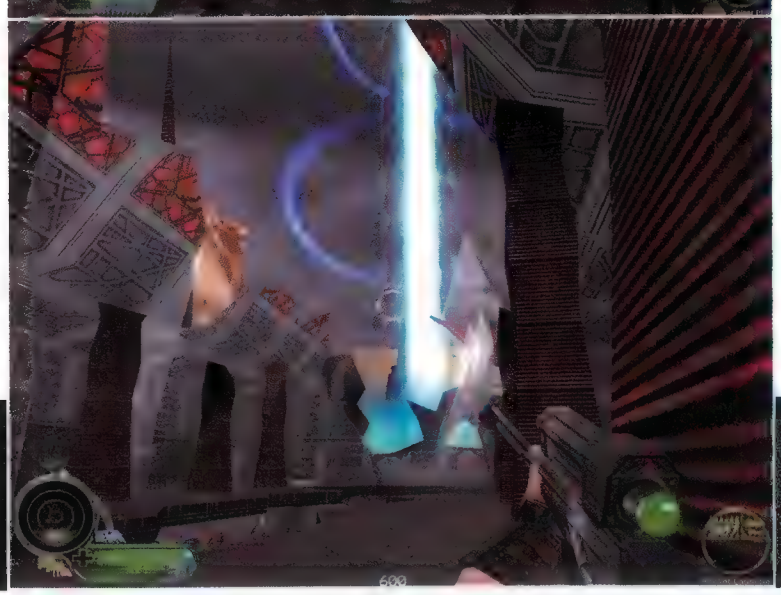
Command & Conquer: Renegade epitomizes the post 9/11 era of small group special operation warfare. *Renegade* is the sixth game in the *Command & Conquer* series and the first to create a first-person experience of the battlefield action. You are Havoc, the bigger-than-life, tough-as-nails Marine who wades into battle to do what no other Global Defense Initiative (GDI) operative can do. If you've played other *C&C* games, you'll recognize the flow of *Renegade*. You start off with missions with simple objectives, limited weaponry and abbreviated scope that will quickly flourish into multifaceted and complex assignments. Happily, *Renegade* also has several tutorial missions to get the player accustomed to the controls and general logistical interfaces employed in-game.

As with typical FPS standard, "WASD" key interface with mouse free-look controls is standard while in "Havoc" mode. When driving vehicles, movement stays the same but the mouse is best to control the direction and firing of the primary and secondary weapons. I found the control structure to be simple and was not overwhelmed with commands or options.

Throughout *Renegade*, you are the hero of the GDI in its battle against world domination by The Brotherhood of NOD and you have at your command an awesome arsenal with which to get the job done. With over 20 varieties of vehicles—eleven of which you can control—and 23 weapons, you can cause all manners of total body reconstruction by way of high velocity projectiles. It is also an acceptable strategy to run over your opponents, *Carmageddon*-style, but the visual impact is somewhat lessened when you hit them at 20 miles-per-hour with 50 tons of tank. You also have the ability to shoot planes and helicopters out of the sky, which gives a visceral thrill.

The game takes place in various areas of the "world,"

"IT IS ACCEPTABLE STRATEGY TO RUN OVER YOUR OPPONENTS AT 20 MILES PER HOUR WITH 50 TONS OF TANK"



There is a tremendous sense of atmosphere in ***Renegade***, being set in an industrial future.

including inside a submarine, inside mountain facilities, in a ship, on a plane, and on various beach-fronts. In short: varied. Using a proprietary graphics engine developed at Westwood, *Renegade* effectively models large external and internal environments (including the transitions), weather effects and character models. The in-game cut scenes carry over the same look and feel of the game engine (including chunkiness) and continue the storyline in an entertaining but sometimes frustrating fashion. Unfortunately, it is not possible to exit out of cut sequences, so if you've saved your position directly before a sequence, you are stuck having to watch it through. Additionally, load times from a fresh start or while running from a saved position are pretty long (I've seen about a minute or so on a PIII 750, 256MB RAM) which I hope Westwood addresses in the next patch.

Renegade provides much of what I look for in a FPS: great graphics, fast game play, big weapons and even bigger explosions. The ability to drive a tank straight into the battle is also a major plus. However, while Westwood got the big things right, they could have done better on the little things that us hardcore gamers pick up on. One example is the lack of nostrils on characters in cut-scenes. Another is the inability for the Rocket Tank to blow up the wooden boxes scattered around, reducing the limited realism that exists to almost nil. Finally, it would have been nice for the NOD and GDI folks to show location-based damage and explode or disintegrate when shot by the protagonist or from air-support. There are splashes of red when attacked, but they simply fall to the ground and disappear. Small arms do leave some location damage on inanimate objects, which is nice. Personally, I would have gone for the "M" rating to make it just that much more interesting.

Also, continuing on with the nature of FPS, there are many hunts for keys and buttons. While in-game, they call it "hack the mainframe" or "locate access badge," but it all amounts to the same thing. Bottom line: *Renegade* is a fun but typical shooter with the added enticement of extending a best-selling storyline and flipping the standard *C&C* gameplay into first-person.

The multi-player element is much of the same, but has a stronger emphasis on strategic thinking and is structured as base on base warfare. Many modes exist along the lines of capture the flag with resource management. It has a similar feel to the single-player mode, but you need to manage money and vehicle/manpower availability.

"WHILE WESTWOOD GOT THE BIG THINGS RIGHT, THEY COULD HAVE DONE BETTER ON THE LITTLE THINGS THAT HARDCORE GAMERS PICK UP ON."

PC

COMMAND AND CONQUER: RENEGADE

play rating

developer: westwood publisher: westwood available: now

Although it's not as solid as one could have wished, Westwood attempt at converting *Command & Conquer* into a FPS is noble—and it packs just enough punch to entertain.

GAUNTLET: DARK LEGACY

developer: midway publisher: midway available: now

If Guantlet were a used car, it'd be a '72 Pinto with 400,000 miles on it. Back yet again, making the last stop in port city, Dark Legacy actually picked up a few exclusive features along the way–namely higher resolution graphics, some new power-ups, and an expanded inventory system. Honestly, I'm surprised at just how enduring the Gauntlet dynamic is. It's a hard game to put down even having played the coin-op, PlayStation, Dreamcast, and PS2 versions. If by some strange twist of fate you haven't played an incarnation of the game, Gauntlet dates back to the earliest semblance of gameplay–shoot anything that moves, eat anything resembling food, amass gold and magic, and find keys to open your way. The medieval guise and multi-player madness may never grow old–especially as long as they have big tits and carry a large staff.

DAVE HALVERSON

play rating ●●●●●

SPY HUNTER

developer: midway publisher: midway available: now

Arguably the mission based driving game to beat, I find Spy Hunter somewhat an exercise in memorization as you traverse each treacherous path discovering which weapon to use where. It's all quite matter of fact once you get the lay of the land, and as a result, pretty routine as far as I'm concerned. Looking for 60 frames, cool water fx, and a spot of the old bump mapping for my Xbox, I'm a little bitter too. I can really see however, where casual gamers see SH as the second coming, from the ready to retire (please, I'll pay for it) Peter Gun theme down to the nifty transforming car. Nothing gets America going like cheese ball secret agent garb, and this game is soaking in it. Technically, while the water effects pale next to Bloodwake's and the frame rate can't make up it's mind, SH is easy on the eyes, and innovative where it needs it most–in the variety of weapons and scenarios. Not my cup of truth serum, but a cool action racer no matter how you slice it.

DAVE HALVERSON

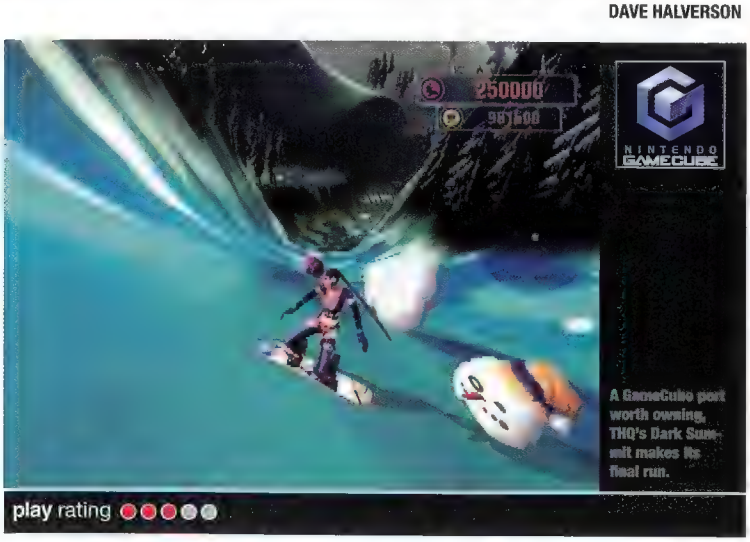
play rating ●●●●●

DARK SUMMIT

developer: radical ent. publisher: thq available: now

One of the few games that actually warrants being available console wide, if you haven't yet feasted on the snow covered love of THQ's Dark Summit this is your last call. While the GameCube version doesn't quite live up to the integrity of the Xbox game, it's impressive nevertheless with some added effects (most notably reflective boards) and the benefit of being manipulated by the genius GC pad. In case you've been living in a cave (dude, can you still say that?) the gameplay finds the sexy, rebellious, and most importantly big breasted, Naya (I'll bet she's a Pink fan too) shredding the slopes–mission upon mission–in order to earn her way across the mountains and uncover a sinister military plot. From jibbing roast turkeys off of picnic tables to sequential flips, grinds, and jumps the first snow boarding rpg delivers on all fronts. The missions are short and sweet giving the game perfect pacing, and you can stop in at the equipment hut before you hit the lifts and enjoy the fruits of your labor by playing dress-up. It's every boys dream.

DAVE HALVERSON



play rating ●●●●●

MCGRATH

developer: acclaim publisher: acclaim available: now

The worlds worst racing game continues to spread like a virus, making the GameCube (a port for every port!) its final destination. Here, it lumbers as it does everywhere else. Muddy trick mechanics, mindless control, and lopsided balance is compounded by headache rock, clipping, and courses that look like they were peeled from a roll of Bounty. I was hoping Acclaim would tweak it somewhat for the GameCube but in the end I can see why they opted to not sink another penny into this poor excuse for a racing game. It'll no doubt make bank on the box art and license alone, but that doesn't make it any less brown. The bottom feeder among MX games, McGrath needs a new lease on life badly. Either that or to be canned completely. Stop the madness. Microsoft... just say no!

DAVE HALVERSON

play rating ●●●●●

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H02004

RIPPING TIME!

John K's latest in ultra-manly animation gets the superhero treatment on Game Boy Advance

Hopefully THQ will make us a game that rips as much as *The Ripping Friends* cartoon, created by John Kricfalusi and Spumco Animation Studios, home of Earth's greatest dog and cat duo (although, you wouldn't know it by looking at them), Ren and Stimpy. Although little is known about the game beyond what we can decipher from these here screen shots, (it must be an action game!) you can rest assured that if it says Spumco on the box, it will have some redeeming qualities inside. In case you weren't aware (which, if you're over 12 or a cartoon addict, are probably not) the Ripping Friends—Crag, Rip, Slab and Chunk—are the four manliest men in the world, even though their Mother, He-Mom, knocks the crap out of them on a regular basis. So powerful are the Ripping Friends that their underwear travel into space and nearly change the course of history, while the very calluses on their feet are capable of conjuring a Friction beast capable of robbing the entire planet of its friction—now, that's power! They hail from R.I.P.C.O.T. ("Really Impressive Prototype City of Next Tuesday"—without the 'n') and live just slightly ahead of the rest of the planet—unfortunately, the particular nemesis featured in the game lives in Next Thursday, so you see the paradox. It's the coolest superhero send up ever, so lets hope the game does it proud.

DAVE HALVERSON

GAME BOY ADVANCE

RIPPING FRIENDS — preview

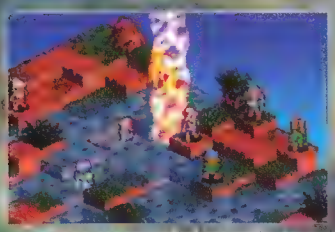
developer: thq publisher: thq available: tba

My favorite cartoon molded into a GBA game! What could be better than that!? Okay, so, alot of things. But it's pretty good!

FIGHT IT OUT!

Assume the role of Alphonse, a knight of Galicia, sent on a mission to investigate the intentions of the suspect governing body of the Holy Lodis Empire and solve the mystery of Ovis. Along the way, you will experience many trials and tribulations, but you must survive the unrelenting battles and cultivate your characters' abilities to reveal your true destiny.

Discover powerful character classes with the new Emblem System!



Cast powerful magic to decimate the enemy forces!

All new Quest Mode allows you to discover hidden items and weapons not available in the main game.

Go head-to-head against a friend by using the Game Boy® Advance Game Link® cable!

Play rating 5/5
- PLAY Magazine

...one of the best Strategy RPGs to arrive this year on any platform.
Gaming Intelligence Agency

Strategy RPG enthusiasts have a new reason to purchase a Game Boy Advance
- RPGamer

...rich, long, rewarding and insanely addictive
- GamePro

Tactics Ogre™

The Knight of Lodis

The next exciting chapter in the OGRE BATTLE SAGA

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
MILD LANGUAGE
MILD VIOLENCE

GAME BOY ADVANCE

RPG/SIM

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BRAND SPANKNG NEO

Sammy re-awakens one of fighting's best. King of Fighters heads for a new home and a new lease on life.

words dave halverson

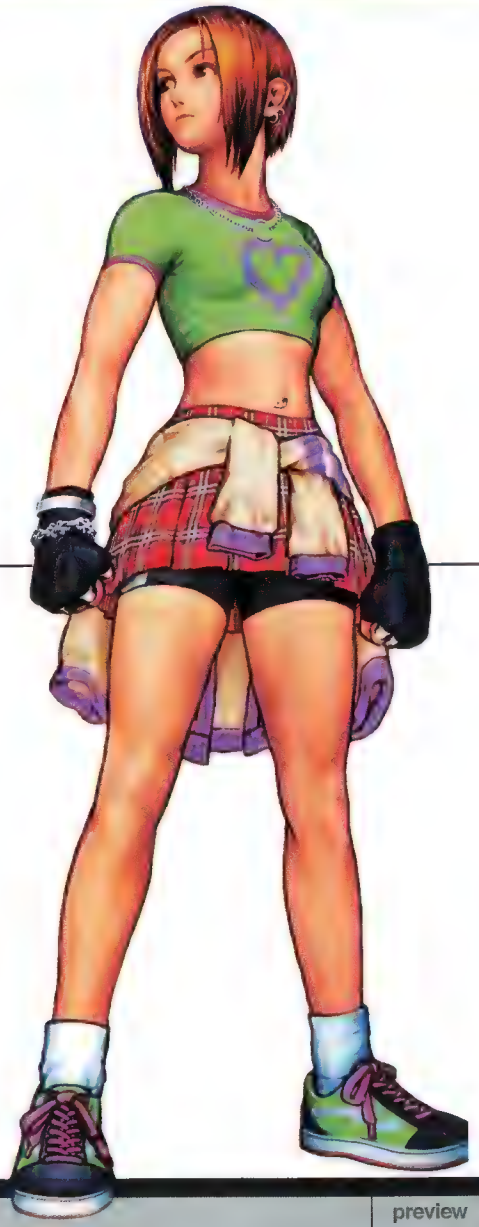
The first leg in Sammy's U.S. gaming assault is off to a killer start. If *King of Fighters: Neo Blood* is any indication, we can expect great things from them in the future. Not only does *Neo Blood* offer the essential "Team" and "Single" modes (each with link up capabilities) plus "Survival" play, but 24 richly colored *KoF* combatants that look amazing on the small screen. Exhibiting the level of detail, shading, and animation you'd expect from a 32-bit portable—right down to Mia's treasured assets—all but the supers (which appear a bit choppy at the moment) look near coin-op quality—only smaller. While the backgrounds are sadly flat, visually they live up to the quality we've come to expect from the series, although, I suppose we'll have to wait to see the bg's in *Street Fighter Alpha* and the Advance edition of *Guilty Gear X* before we pass final judgement on Artoon's overall GBA prowess. The Advance is 32-bit, but obviously some give and take applies when you're dealing with larger, more detailed characters, animation and effects.

Nevertheless, the system takes to fighting games like a bottom rung actor to boxing. With the shoulder buttons so accessible, you can actually use all four rather effortlessly, making the Advance the perfect destination for any number of classic 16 and 32-bit hand-drawn fighters.

Normally, this is the part where I beg Nintendo incessantly for a backlit model—but to hell with it, it's not gonna happen. I'll continue to rely on my trusty Pelican (gratuitous plug at 9 o'clock) flip-up light to save me from buying a season pass to my local eye care professional. *KoF: Neo Blood* is shaping up very nicely but beware, it may lead to an insatiable craving for Advance versions of *Samurai Shodown* and *Magician Lord*. Can you imagine...

The Game Boy Advance is the perfect environment for classic 2D fighting

"THE FIRST LEG OF SAMMY'S U.S. GAMING ASSAULT IS OFF TO A KILLER START."



Mai fans won't be disappointed.... For that matter, neither will Terry fans, or anyone else.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

KING OF FIGHTERS: NEO BLOOD

preview

developer marvelous ent publisher sammy available now

KoF comes roaring back, landing on the Advance, looking none the worse for wear. Classic hand-drawn fighting has a new home!

HERD THIS

After a brief stint on PSone, the game amateur shepherds everyone have been looking for lands on GBA

It was an underdog, yes. But *Sheep* definitely deserves some credit for ingenuity, and now that it's arriving on the Game Boy Advance, it may actually get the attention that it deserves. And it's essentially unchanged from its PC/PSone predecessor—which is quite a good thing.

Sheep lends itself to the simplicity of gameplay that the GBA commands, as it has always been a top-down strategy title. For the uninitiated—and there's probably a lot—it follows a trend that *Lemmings* began so long ago. But instead of little buggers with an inclination to jump off cliffs, you're in charge of herding a band of idiotic ovines through disaster. And trust me, deadly pits of impalement lurk everywhere.

Using a sheep dog, you must lead each of the wooly mammals to safety amid a variety of obstacles. Farm equipment, spikes, flame throwers, meat grinders and much more stand in your way. And don't expect the little varmints to obey your every order—they're extremely sensitive, so you'll have to approach them using the utmost caution. The faster you run toward them, the quicker you react, the faster they will scatter.

Possibly the only difference in this handheld version—besides is downsized levels and somewhat reduced graphics—is its distinctive anime look. Each character has traded in his/her/its hip British edge for an overly cute, extremely adorable overhaul. This doesn't really affect gameplay in the least bit, but the re-envisioned look does act as evidence of whom this game is ultimately targeted for. Japanese consumers can look for it under its overseas title, *Hitsuji no Kimochi*, on store shelves now.

JON M GIBSON

"...YOU'RE IN CHARGE OF HERDING A BAND OF IDIOTIC OVINES THROUGH DISASTER."

Adding a sense of ease, *Sheep* gives players the ability to zoom in and out to reveal more of the play field

SHEEP	preview
developer: mind's eye/capcom publisher: capcom available: spring	Even though it was born onto the PC and PSone early last year, *Sheep* is a game that was destine to be in the palm of your hand. Herd away!

BARK AT THE MOON

In the tradition of Zombies Ate My Neighbors Universal's Monster Force brings manic overhaed action to the GBA

Anyone who remembers *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* for Genesis or SNES will find much to love about Universal Interactive's *Monster Force*, the first improvement on manic top-down gaming to come along since. You play as one of three creations of Dr. Victor Frankenstein, brother of Percy (yep, you read it right—Percy). Driven from their suburban homes after their "creations" rile the neighbors, the Brothers Frank founded Monsterland, and soon after, trouble is afoot. Dr. Frankenstein has vanished (along with his latest experiment) and Monsterland has gone berserk.

You play as one of Vic's three fave creations: Wolfie, Frank or Drac—of whom the usual rules apply regarding brawn vs. speed—to unlock the mystery (you can also link up and play muti-player in nine arena-type venues). The *Gauntlet*-style gameplay, at its core, is pure, overhead search-and-destroy, made compelling by the animation and environments, complimented by all manner of obstacles. Beyond the usual top-down fare, however (like keys to open gates), warp funnels, barriers, and fairly perplexing mazes keep you fixated on each area as you use the game's innovative shooting system to stock up on atoms and build your character. There are three types of shots to master in *Monster Force*, along with level specific enemies that can only be killed by a certain type. To compound matters, there's also a certain way to off them so that they leave behind atoms, which play an integral role in the game. Using atoms, you can buy useful power-ups or save up to purchase relics, which have permanent effects on the characters. Throw all of this together in a spooky cartoon setting with big bosses and fluid animation and you've got a great GBA game. *Monster Force* is a well thought out and executed action/adventure packed with mesmerizing hours of gameplay, definitely not to be missed.

DAVE HALVERSON

GAME BOY ADVANCE

MONSTER FORCE | preview

developer: digital eclipse | publisher: universal int. | available: may

There's always room for more overhead action games, especially with as much depth as Digital Eclipse have forged into this little gem.

BASEBALL ADVANCE

This is the point where an obligatory baseball pun was supposed to be pasted, but I'll save all of our faithful **play** readers the grief—and myself some humiliation. Instead, an introduction to the best handheld ball game in town is long overdue. *Baseball Advance*, yet another fine product of the THQ/Sega hand shake, packs a full roster of sportsmen from all 30 MLB clubs—though, the lineup isn't exactly up-to-date with current 2002-03 standings. And if you're looking for variety, only four major league stadiums aren't much. But those are only minor itches, considering Smilebit has installed an excellent batting and pitching system as compensation. Even though you can't move players around on the mound or in the box—which might irk a few hardcore fanboys—there is a great amount of sensitivity to swing for low or highballs. Coupled with stellar player animations—the pitcher nods and signs fluidly from the infield—you may even be inspired to pick up a bat, slide on some gloves and knock a few rounds out of the park. *Baseball Advance* is all the excitement of a homerun and more.

Sorry—I had to.

JON M GIBSON

preview
developer: smilebit/sega
publisher: thq
available: spring

DEFENDER OF THE CROWN

Sure, it's a classic console title of yester-year, but *Defender of the Crown* still occupies a space rarely approached by developers—that being the medieval age, one of chivalry, chain mail and damsels in distress. And your goal is simple: Find the priceless Crown of England and protect it from the ruthless Norman knights bent on ravaging the countryside. But you're not just a civil peasant with a pitchfork and determination. The competitions are plentiful with armor to match: crowd-pleasing jousts, vicious sword fights, catapult-driven castle sieges—it's all part of the King Arthur air. The battles are varied, with much attention focused on dexterity and strategy—it's not just straight-edge action.

ET COHEN

preview
developer: cinemaware
publisher: metro 3d
available: july

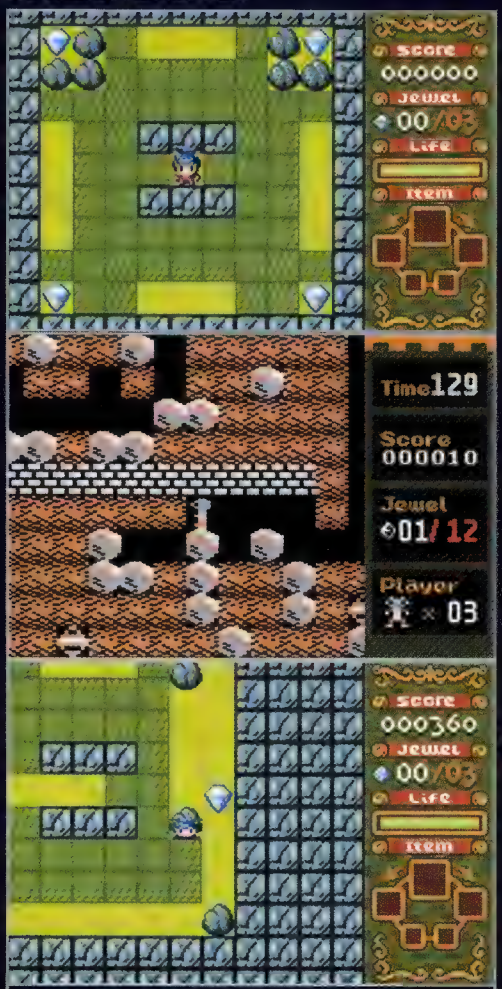
CRAZY CHASE

Any game with a big-nosed freak as its star is guaranteed to capture my attention. You may remember ol' Kid Klown from his 1994 Super Nintendo debut—it wasn't an Oscar-winner, by any means, but *Crazy Chase* definitely had the creepy circus veneer going for it. For some reason, the recluse Kid has now been recruited to save "Her Royal Bratness," Princess Honey, from the clutches of stinky space pirate, Dirty Joe. The resilient *Crash Bandicoot* is probably the closest competitor to this nose-honking carnival. The action here unfolds at a slightly more angler dimension than traditional platformers. There's also four bonus mini-games, so be sure to go an extra round with Whack-A-Mole.

ET COHEN

preview
developer: kemco
publisher: kemco
available: september

BOULDER DASH EX



Converting dusty 80's arcade coin-ops into comfortable handheld versions has become a popular trend. It's not a mortal sin, just habitual—and predictable—for the dozens of GBA publishers in the market. With *Boulder Dash EX*, though, Vision Works does there fair share to revamp—or "re-envision," as their name implies—a testament to the puzzle genre. Besides a bit of a graphic overhaul, players can now zoom in or out to reveal the entire map; and the "magic stone," a handy pick-up hidden throughout the game, allows you to rotate the level 90-degrees, which oftentimes effects the certain of gravity (wise players can use this to great advantage, squashing the enemy with loose objects). As for elements that carried over: The task remains the same. Slide boulders out of the way and collect gems, all the while avoiding a plethora of bats, scorpions and other such annoyances. There are six worlds to explore, 150 stages (50 new, 100 classic), and 50 additional puzzles for multi-tainment (up to four players via link cable). At least it's not another cousin of *Bust-A-Move*; *Boulder Dash* definitely offers some well-needed diversity for puzzle geeks on the go.

JON M GIBSON

preview
developer: vision works
publisher: kemco
available: august

NASCAR HEAT

It may not offer a driver's seat view from over the dashboard, but *NASCAR Heat* looks to do wonders with racing genre on GBA. The most potent advantage is the closed circuit level design. Instead of creating a massive, albeit flat and boring terrain set like the shrunken version of *Smuggler's Run*—ultimately a wide-open distraction to the developers—*NASCAR* paid more focus to detailed track design and car physics. There's six different ways to compete: "Arcade" mode, "Beat the Heat," "Multiplayer," "Career," "Single Race" and "Trial." That totals 24 races in the "Career" aspect alone; and the link cable allows friends to join you on a brisk jog at 300 miles per hour (the frame-rate still flies while 12 cars are on-screen at once). But what every new entrant into the racing genre clearly strives to achieve is intensity—the sheer rush of whipping around corners with a 750 horse power stock car under your complete control. With a passive, over-the-top camera, *NASCAR* may not cause the player to sweat profusely, but the game definitely strives to provide aficionados with a throwback to old-school arcade racers.

ET COHEN

preview
developer: crawfish interactive
publisher: infogrames
available: april

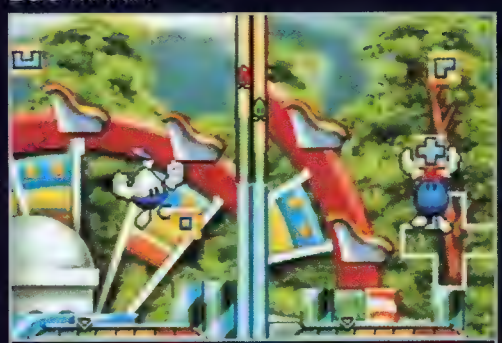
WINGS

We've seen *Top Gun* navigate the skies, but *Wings* is the first World War I aviator to make its way to the GBA. And even though a bi-plane doesn't offer the firepower of a fully armed F-14 jet, the game does follow diligently in the footsteps of the original. Over 200 missions of high-flying aerial acrobatics are jammed in, ranging from the bombing of enemy aerodromes to harrowing, low-altitude dogfights. But the new addition is probably the most enthralling—four players can go head-to-head (or propeller-to-propeller) using link-up mode, wearing the badge of either the do-gooder allies or the despotic Huns. One still has to wonder: Isn't Maverick more marketable than.... well, somebody who flew bi-planes?

JON M GIBSON

preview
developer: cinemaware
publisher: metro 3d
available: may

EGG MANIA



Fear not, this egg is as gentle as a kitten. In fact, as a completely original title—minus any brand awareness, which in a franchise-driven market, is a brave move—*Egg Mania* looks to pack a jolting amount of fun into a tiny, little GBA cart. The objective, you ask? It's basically *Tetris* in reverse. Players compete against one AI character in split-screen, charged with the task of reaching the top of the screen before the rising water from below consumes your plump, yolk-filled ally. The game comes to a head, however, with a surprising blend of color, sprite design and graphic flair, proving that HotGen has a firm grip on most every development perk of the GBA.

ET COHEN

preview
developer: hotgen studios
publisher: kemco
available: september

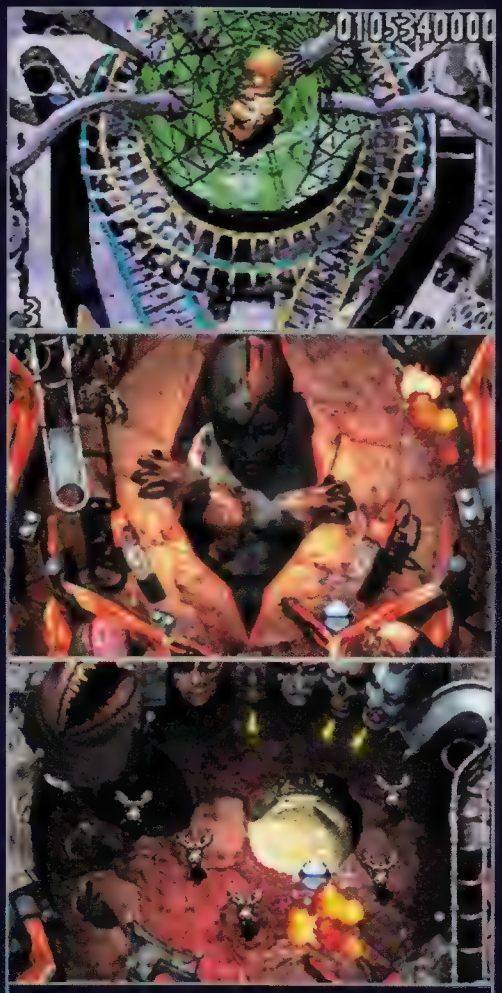
BREATH OF FIRE 2

Game Boy Advance is essentially the Super Nintendo of the palm. It oozes vintage potential at every seam, in every screw hole. That's why it's so pleasant to play an RPG like *Breath of Fire 2* on the go. This sequel packs an astoundingly larger quest than the first, fresher graphics and even more rewarding gameplay—just like it did in larger cartridge form. But the version GBA offers a few features that the SNES managed to evade (mainly because of the non-portable issue): new character art, a brisker walking speed, item trading via link cable, and a "quick save" option that is possibly the biggest plus for any mobile role-playing hound. Nine playable characters will aid you on your quest, the leader being Ryu—reprising his dragon-morphing-hero role—as you wander the fantasy world in search of his missing father and wee lil' sister. Using the Fusion system, you can then merge any of your companions into über-warriors—it's quite a nifty, entertaining tool. Too bad the translation doesn't offer more clarity; as with the original, the broken English conversion can mislead even the most ardent of players.

JON M GIBSON

play rating ●●●●●○
developer: capcom
publisher: capcom
available: now

PINBALL OF THE DEAD



Digitized flippers have always been a strange concept—and I'm not talking about dolphins. In a perfect world, everyone would have a tabletop pinball machine propped up in his or her living room, be it smacked with a "Monster Mash" logo or plastered with the KISS brand. But the world isn't a pot of gold—and there aren't exactly full-fledged arcades in the backseat of the family station wagon. Luckily *Pinball of the Dead* offers some salvation, no matter that it features some hellish zombie themes (so it's not exactly that Muppets board you used to love). As a spin-off of Sega's popular gun-blaster *House of the Dead*, there are of plenty of severed heads, gritted teeth, torn muscles and trickling pieces of brain to admire. With only three boards to appease all your fried-flesh fantasies, WOW has managed to squeeze plenty of gameplay out of quite a simple concept. Each level is divided into three tiers, with zombies running amuck just waiting to be sent back to the grave—remember, your ammo is that mighty silver ball. It's built with replay value in mind, so it's great for quick pick-up-and-play, ball-flinging, monster-slaying madness.

JON M GIBSON

preview
developer: wow entertainment/sega
publisher: thq
available: may

ATARI ANNIVERSARY ADVANCE

Porting a pocketful of old Atari carts onto the GBA is like stepping in time to the days of black-and-white Tiger Electronics' "gems." There's obviously nothing that pushes the system toward trophy status in a 2600 title. But no matter how moldy the Atari may seem in comparison to games like *Golden Sun*, it's still a powerful, nostalgic blast from the heyday of consoles. *Asteroids*, *Battlezone*, *Centipede*, *Missile Command*, *Super Breakout*, and *Tempest* all occupy equal space on this first addition of *Atari Anniversary Advance*, helping to ring in the 30th birthday of the brand. But if you already knew that, test your know-it-all, photographic, video-game membrane with the enclosed "Atari Trivia Challenge."

JON M GIBSON

preview
developer: digital eclipse
publisher: infogrames
available: now

SEGA SMASH PACK

When we first heard that *Sega Smash Pack* would be making its way to the GBA, images of *Phantasy Star II* were unshakable. Sitting in an airport terminal, waiting for the fog to clear on the runway, boredom wouldn't be a question. Ripping into a classic RPG like *Phantasy Star* would have been a joyous occasion, especially as you watched foolish business travelers attempt to negotiate their way into the air. Maybe next time. For now, *Golden Axe*, *Ecco the Dolphin* and *Sonic Spinball* will have to last until the follow-up really stifles our twitter—but this trio does a fine job of whetting our appetite until more Sega Genesis goodness finds a home on the land of Nintendo.

JON M GIBSON

preview
developer: titus
publisher: titus
available: june

BLENDER BROS

Quirky, cool, distinctly Japanese games are a dime a dozen in the portable climate, but Infogrames has rounded up this stray that could possibly pivot into an all-out franchise. Introducing *Blender Bros.*, an astounding new addition to the Hudson catalog—you know, the folks behind the elaborate, long-running legacy of *Bomberman*. Here, you play Blender, leader of the Cosmo Keepers, a dog-like incarnation that whirls his super long ears to collect items, slap enemies and fly. To aid in his quest of ridding the universe of Zooligans and locating the missing Buffer-Kong, Blender will find various Mini-Bros. scattered about each of seven planets. When you join forces, new special abilities will be added to your arsenal, helping you to conquer all 21 levels. To promote multi-player link-up, there are also eight mini-games that are unlockable as you progress through single player missions—they're varied, too, one showing Blender in a futuristic cart-racer of sorts. This is what we've been yearning for: classic side-scrolling action a la *Donkey Kong Country*. *Blender Bros.* shells out that ape-like look and feel—just with a more eclectic, colorful splash of imagination.

JON M GIBSON

preview
developer: hudson
publisher: infogrames
available: april

LILO AND STITCH

Kids are too hip these days—sitting there in their baggy Bermudas and electric high-tops—to stomach the hyper gaiety, old-school Disney films so shamelessly emitting from the screen, and with *Lilo and Stitch* it seems Disney knows it. If ever there was an animated film that seems to bridge the gap between kids and adults, *Lilo and Stitch* looks like it. Of course, if they bust out into song at any point, I take it all back. The first game based on the film, which opens later this Summer, is a real shocker. Not only is it not touchy feely, but it's a 2D force to be reckoned with; highly animated and packed with real-deal gameplay. Dare I say, the only game it compares to is *Gunstar Heroes*, at least in terms of the detailed explosions and polished look and feel. The animation is the best seen on the system to date, that's for sure. Digital Eclipse have the GBA completely mastered. Playing as Lilo, a four-armed alien, the action/shooting bits are pure, patterned-based bliss, while, as Lilo, things take on a more platform/puzzle feel, mixing things up nicely, traversing the games early levels. It's far from being completed, but *Lilo and Stitch* has now rocketed to the top of my list of most wanted GBA games.

DAVE HALVERSON

preview

developer: digital eclipse
publisher: disney interactive
available: summer

LORD OF THE RINGS: PART ONE

[Gandalf] This is the one ring that he lost many ages ago. He greatly desires it, but he must not get it.
[Pippin] Merry and I are coming with you. Sam is an excellent fellow and he is coming too.

Not to be outdone by all of the polygonal goings on in Middle Earth, Pocket Studios out of England is preparing a Game Boy Advance RPG—*Lord of the Rings: Part One*—with classic 2D hand-drawn implications. The game covers a lot of ground; from all of *Fellowship of the Ring* to the first half of *The Two Towers*. Controlling up to nine fellowship members at once in classic turn-based RPG style, the game unfolds among realistic backgrounds faithful to Tolkien's descriptions, created from 3D models complete with rendered shadows, before being plopped into the Advance. The turn-based combat, which includes, of course, loads of spell casting and healing, has an A.I. feature reminiscent of *Lunar* that should the player choose allows the CPU to command the battles. These screens are the real deal—the game certainly looks amazing.

DAVE HALVERSON

preview

developer: pocket studios
publisher: universal
available: q4

SPIDER-MAN: THE MOVIE GAME

One thing is clear the moment you begin playing *Spider-Man* for the Advance; this is not just another excuse to make a game based on a movie. It's a serious 2D *Spider-Man* game—in fact, it rivals *Blue Sky*'s 32X game, the reigning 2D Spidey champ. I do, however, think someone should launch an investigation of Digital Eclipse—I think they may be cloning programmers. Flying through the first two levels for this preview, the games most notable assets come in the form of highly animated characters and explosions, a wicked amalgam of fighting, wall hugging, and web slinging, plus a couple of unexpected extras in the form of animated comic fonts that synch with every punch and kick ("POW! BLAMM! THWACK!") and the ability to take pictures at certain points in the levels. Diversity rises to the surface quickly too, as Spidey negotiates the twisting corridors of an office building crashing down above him.

DAVE HALVERSON

preview

developer: activision
publisher: activision
available: june

ICE AGE

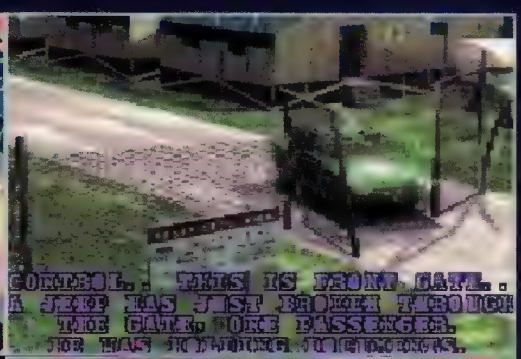
I was hoping *Ice Age* would button up nicely and it definitely has—in it's own, weird kind of way. *Ice Age* reminds me a little of *Kolibri*—the hummingbird shooter that (along with *Chaotix*) keeps my 32X at the ready—being a somewhat of a peculiar take on a universal formula. *Ice Age* looks, feels, and smells completely different than it's many side-scrolling brethren, but holds it own as a result. Equate it to the *Teletubbies* syndrome, where it so borders on lunatic that it blurs the line between kid friendly and surreal. Considering you're bouncing along—floating on skunk juice and collecting acorns—as either an infant on the back of a mammoth or a freakish sloth, the characters certainly back up the bizarre nature of the game play. While things do tend to get repetitious over the long haul the execution is strangely engulfing. Mixing traditional platforming maneuvers like floating, sliding, dodging, and butt bouncing (only with an elephant) the critters you don't beat with your trunk are used as launching pads a la every platformer since Mario—always fun. Without the level design to back it up however, *Ice Age* doesn't evolve as much as it should (and could) and the bosses—though a few are cleverly devised—leave much to be desired. The art on the other hand, spread over 10 richly layered locales, is exceptional, and the music is high-end in the GBA spectrum. In a sea of vanilla platforms, *Ice Age*'s peculiar charms may be enough to push it's woolly arse over the top.

DAVE HALVERSON

"WHILE THINGS TEND TO GET REPETITOUS, THE EXECUTION IS STRANGELY ENGULFING"

play rating ●●●○○
developer: A2M
publisher: Ubisoft
available: now

TOP GUN: FIRESTORM



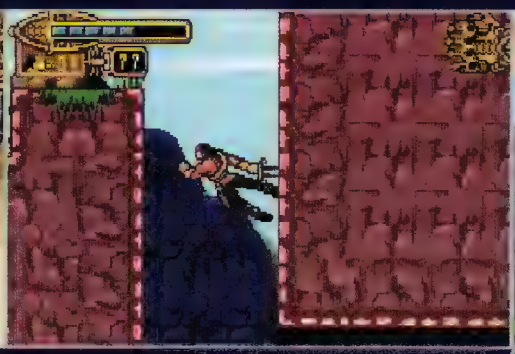
Continuing in the *Top Gun* tradition of questionable game design, Firestorm hits a bit of turbulence just after take off, an almost scary parody of its otherwise promising PS2 counterpart. It's training mission numero-uno and you're ordered to clear two groups of ground targets—one of three operations in the mission before you can proceed. If you take out all but one (no easy task seeing as how you'll have to fly low and use your guns since, like the PS2 game, missiles run out long before their targets) and then crash, they all re-appear. I can understand this regimen once the game gets underway but it's no way to treat poor Maverick in training. From there—although I question the idea of an isometric jet fighting game that moves at the pace of *Desert Strike* in the first place—*Firestorm* is a pretty cool game. The graphics, especially the look of the ocean, are impressive, the music and cinemas (pitting Maverick against Ice) are both noteworthy, and the control is passable, given the limited line-of-sight an isometric environment can provide in a game about jets. I'd rather see Titus clean up *Afterburner* and drop in Maverick for the handheld game, but if you're itchin' to enter the danger zone with your GBA, it could be a lot worse.

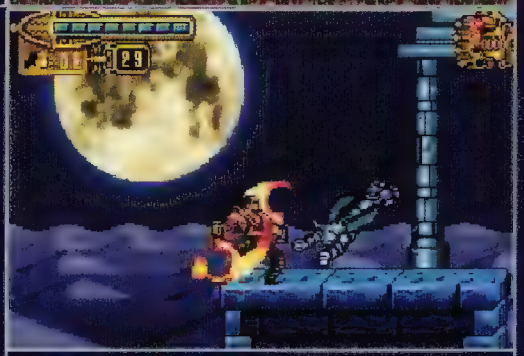
DAVE HALVERSON

"I QUESTION THE IDEA OF AN ISOMETRIC JET FIGHTING GAME THAT MOVES AT THE PACE OF *DESERT STRIKE*."

play rating ●●○○○
developer: fluid studios
publisher: titus
available: now

SCORPION KING: SWORD OF OSIRIS





I recently read somewhere where *The Scorpion King: Sword of Osiris* was referred to as a "*Castlevania* rip off," which raises the obvious question: Is that such a bad thing? I mean, if you're going to pattern a 2D platformer with dark under currents after something, you might as well begin at the top. Which is exactly what Wayforward Technologies has done in sculpting *The Scorpion King* for the GBA—the off-shoot of the best muscle-head movie since Arnold sliced off James Earl's head. While *Castlevania IV* influences (and *Rastan* and *Rygar* and on and on) definitely seep to the surface, *SK* has enough tricks of it own to lure hardcore side-scrollers to the table. To begin with, the characters and animation are the stuff of 16-bit legend. Seven or so years ago, we'd have marveled at these graphics (some of us still do). Matahyus has a *Midnight Resistance* meets Conan (the Barbarian) feel, and the level specific enemies reach far beyond the usual drone status, aspiring to the pattern based nightmares of yesteryear—when medusa heads and pesky gargoyles invaded our dreams. The sky and backgrounds are painted with generous parallax, and the fine detail is pervasive; water shimmers in that old familiar way while synthetic lighting sweeps over gold and lights up parts of bodies around torches. We also get a bevy of effects that 16-bit could never muster along with a host of increasingly massive bosses the likes that you rarely—if ever—see in a side-scroller these days. Scaling, rotation—all the old buzz words apply—and the last boss is a chapter all its own.

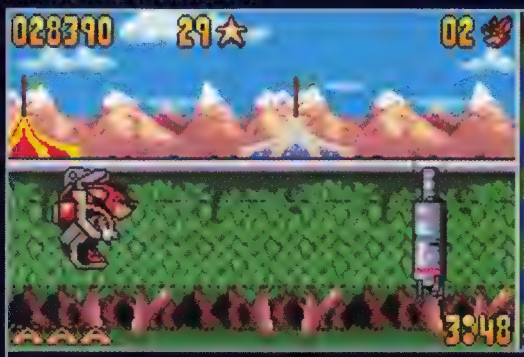
It's one thing to be a clone, it's another to be a really good one. *The Scorpion King* awaits all who thirst for a fix of old school 2D. If only the music was a notch better, the red might spill over into that final dot.

DAVE HALVERSON

play rating

developer: wayforward technologies,
publisher: universal interactive
available: now

AERO THE ACROBAT



Feeling somewhat vindicated, I got behind *Aero the Acrobat* back in '93 like it was no one's business, and am probably one of the few editors who actually conquered both installments. Not to brag (well, maybe a little), but *Aero*'s Achilles heel was most definitely its difficulty—only psychos like me ever beat these games. It's other flaw, as I saw it, was its fruity circus music which, unfortunately, was packed for the trip to the GBA. The important thing, however, is that the game—devised and designed by David Siller—has been lovingly tweaked by Atomic Planet, taming the bat to the extent that not only does the game look better than ever, but the difficulty is now palatable for normal humans. One of the very best 16-bit platformers has made its way to the GBA—the dumping ground for sub-standard 2D posers. 90% of the games booted to retail for the Advance—churned through a quick get-it-in-a-box process—don't do the strain justice. Outside of *Castlevania*, *Mario World*, and a handful of others, it's a 2D mine field out there, so it's comforting to see legendary mascot-driven platformers like *Aero*, from gaming's most endearing era, make their way to the small screen. With any luck Treasure's library, along with Sega's, Konami's, Capcom's, and more Nintendo (*Yoshi's Island*!) will follow. *Aero* arrived the day before we closed the issue so, you'll have to wait for my review, but rest assured, it will be glowing.

DAVE HALVERSON

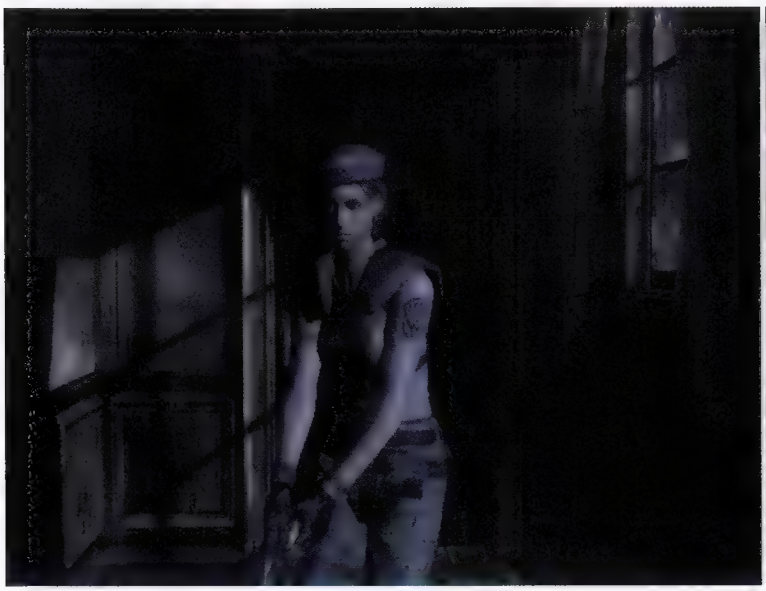
"ONE OF THE VERY BEST 16-BIT PLATFORMERS HAS MADE IT'S WAY TO THE GBA."

preview

developer: atomic planet
publisher: metro 3D
available: april

BIOHAZARD

Best-looking game ever?



I am very tempted to say something about Capcom's GameCube remake of the first *Resident Evil* (known hereafter by its Japanese name, *Biohazard*), but I feel the need to resist, as its such a loaded comment. Oh, the hell with it. GameCube *Biohazard* is the best-looking game I've ever seen. My words and these shots will not tell half the story. You need to see this game moving. And I'm not talking about watching some MPEG off the internet. You need to see it for real on a proper monitor, and I promise you, your jaw will be scraping the floor.

First, we have the best-looking real-time character models ever attempted. Just watch Jill Valentine go into her idle animation; the sense of reality created by her animation and the look on her face are truly eerie. I've never seen anything like it. And the backgrounds! My word, they look incredible, full of animation and detail. The camera may be static, but these environments are truly alive. Dramatic lighting effects bathe the proceedings in a cloak of verisimilitude, while these same lighting effects also apply to the characters, truly integrating them into the world. It's wonderful stuff.

But this isn't just candy. It goes beyond that. The sheer accomplishment of the graphics has a psychological effect, because never has my brain been so well fooled by a video game. To my brain, this game looks and sounds real, and this makes the experience very, very intense.

We'll have a proper review of the English version next month, so just think of this as a teaser for the joy that is to come. You won't believe this game when you see it.

PETER GARDEN

developer: capcom
publisher: capcom
available: now (japan)

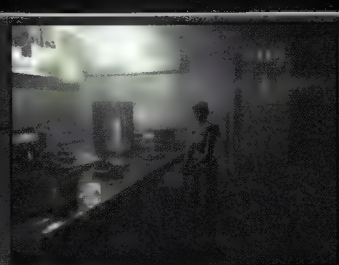
preview

These shots look pretty good, but they are nothing compared to the real thing.

JAPAN'S TOP TEN (as of 03/24/02)

Capcom's incredible *Resident Evil* remake only managed to debut at #3. Let's hope it fares a little better here.

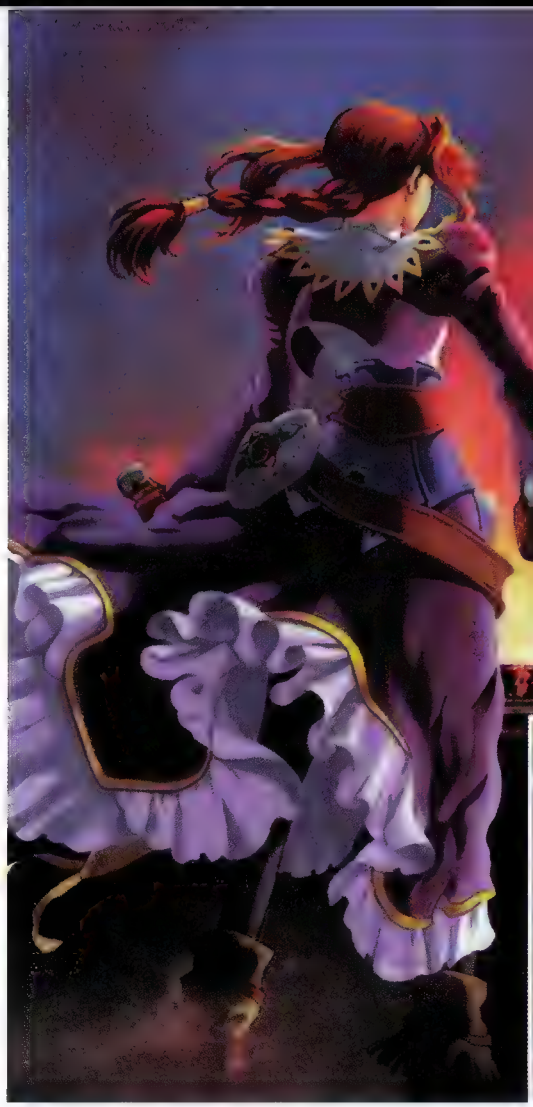
1. **One Piece Grand Battle** Bandai **ps**
2. **Sakura Taisen 4** Sega **dc**
3. **Biohazard** Capcom **gc**
4. **Power Pro Kun Pocket** Konami **gba**
5. **Onimusha 2** Capcom **ps2**
6. **Let's Make the J. League** Sega **ps2**
7. **Garakuta Kingdom** Taito **ps2**
8. **Wild Arms Advanced Third** Sony **ps2**
9. **Kyojin no Doshin** Nintendo **gc**
10. **Shin Megami Tensei II** Atlus **ps**



3. Biohazard Capcom **gc**

WILD ARMS ADVANCED 3rd

The wild west never seemed so cool



Finally, the PS2 is getting some worthwhile RPGs. First we got *Final Fantasy X* and its resultant beauty, but just in the past month we've seen Namco's sterling *Xenosaga* and this game, *Wild Arms Advanced 3rd*. With its appealingly executed western theme, solid battle system, and really unique graphic engine, this is a game that is easy to pick up and enjoy straightaway, even without a deep understanding of the Japanese language. Of course, the story will go by obliquely, but you can still enjoy the simple but very fun battle system, and I never tired of looking at the game. The characters are cel-shaded, which is still a nice effect, but they and the backgrounds all benefit from a very interesting looking filter which makes everything look like a highly detailed colored-pencil sketch. Just stare at a static background and you can see miniscule little strokes, as if each frame of the real-time graphics was an original drawing. It's really great looking.

Wild Arms 3 is coming to the States, so we'll reserve final judgement till then, but certainly the mechanics of a very good game are in place.

PETER GARDEN

developer: sony
publisher: sony
available: now (japan)

preview

KYOJIN NO DOSHIN

It could be argued that Nintendo are doing themselves no favors by releasing curious niche titles like this while the world waits with baited breath for *Mario*, *Zelda*, *Starfox* et al, while Sony continues to [illegible] just not one for every taste.

You play the title character, Doshin, a yellow, nearly featureless giant, with great powers and a warm heart. As you walk the land, you notice a scattering of lone villagers wanting help. You can help them by moving trees (vital to their well being) near them, or raising and lowering the land with your magic. In no time, the scattering of villagers becomes a teeming village with houses and monuments dedicated to you, who may [illegible] By [illegible] grow in size, soon towering so greatly over the villagers it becomes [illegible] you inhabit the body of another giant, and are again reduced to a mere giant.

But there is a dark side to Doshin, an evil form that you can call upon at any time. Don't like the monument the villagers have built for you? Turn dark and smash the shit out of it. It's fun to show the wrath of God to the villagers, who are always more than happy to make [illegible]

This is a really fun game, sort of a *Pikmin*-in-reverse, that is quite easy to play, even to a non-Japanese speaker. Great for the alternative set.

PETER GARDEN

[illegible] is all these things.

publisher: nintendo
available: now (japan)

play rating

046 ax-d
058 ghost sweeper mikami
063 hanse's
082 escaflowne, the movie
084 real bout high school
086 steel angel kurumi
089 power stone
092 orphen
092 x-mind

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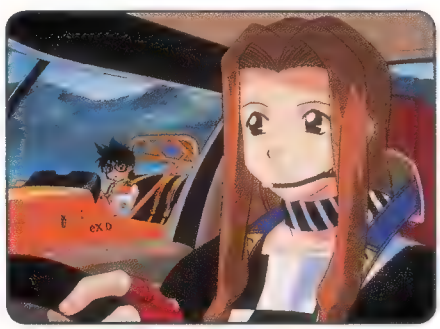
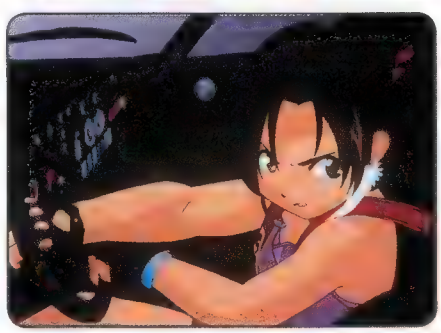
ZOOM ZOOM ZOOM...

In AnimeWorks eX-Driver 2 hot babes race to save the world from smart cars and motor maniacs!

Unexpected, smooth, moody and deliciously different, Media Blaster's *eX-Driver: Downshift* is slated for a July release. In a future where cars drive you, traffic cops in retro-tuner cars are the only line of defense—all the better that they're a couple of hot babes. Meet Lorna Endou and Lisa Sakakino, two very different women fighting a melee of meltdowns, as a future where A.I. auto's rule the road gets way out of hand. Only those with crazy driving skills can become eX licensed, and in episode one, we find out why. Based on a premise that could fall flat for any number of reasons (lack of a sufficient budget to bring off a high speed anime, lackluster chases, or a lack of depth), *eX* manages to not only steer clear of every cliche in the book, but it's unexpectedly layered and detailed. Each chase is produced like something out of *Ronin*, as each perilous high-speed adventure effects the environments, people and places in every direction. The producers filmed real cars to achieve authentic driving from both inside and outside of the vehicles, and the character designs and animation are of the highest quality for series anime. We'll have lots more on eX—currently still in its native Japanese format—in the months ahead.

DAVE HALVERSON





anime previews

eX-Driver (DVD) vol.1

studio: anime works
rating: 13 and up
running time: 125 min.

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SLAYER FOR HIRE

In Manga's latest, Drac is back after a 400 year slumber...and he's hungry as hell

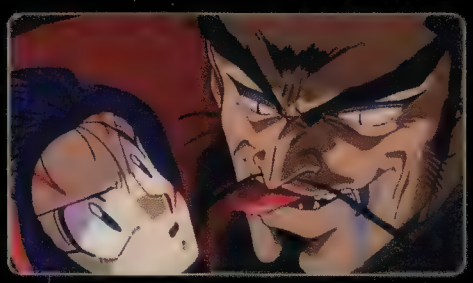
What would happen if you mixed *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* and *Ghostbusters* with *Devil Hunter Yoko*, and a tinge of *Scooby Doo*? Well, you're about to find out in Manga's latest, *Ghost Sweeper Mikami*, a little slice of anime magic—vintage 1994.

The first warrior to slay the Nosferatu Nobunaga, Mitsuhide Akichi, didn't quite get the job done, and now 400 years later, his spirit is called upon again to slay the risen—and uncharacteristically suave—vampire Lord. The old fart of a spirit's chosen one for the job is Tokyo's leading exorcist, Mikami, a huge-breasted demon slayer with an insatiable appetite for yen...lots and lots of yen. She uses her trusty assistant as bait for a measly 255 yen per-hour while the rest of her compadres bring up the rear and help her count the money! She's as self-centered as you can possibly get. I love a girl who knows what she wants.

Meanwhile, Drac is back and he's turning Tokyo into zombie central, sucking the life-force out of anything with a pulse, and the blackguard has a secret mutation that makes him extremely hard to kill—hey, no fair!

Tongue drilled firmly in cheek, *Ghost Sweeper Mikami* is a fast moving, entertaining 60 minutes of over-the-top comedy and ghost-busting, with a unique style—sort of a vintage Miyazaki meets *Dragonball* thing going on—and OVA quality animation that's sure to please. The characters definitely leave you wanting more, but you'll have to settle for the extras on the DVD, like character bios and a photo gallery, because there's no more Mikami to be had.

DAVE HALVERSON



anime reviews

GHOST SWEEPER MIKAMI (DVD)

studio: manga entertainment
rating: 13 & up
running time: 60 minutes

EXTRA GOODS:
"Meet your Excorcist" (character bios), art gallery, Manga extras (previews, catalog, merchandise, websites)

play score

THE ARK OF THE APOCALYPSE HAS BEEN UNLEASHED
Every minute is loaded with jaw-dropping animated action that's paced so blister-fast that you want to hit the pause button just to catch your breath.
– Chuck Dixon, Sigil
SPRIGGAN was the best, most riveting animated feature I've seen in years. – Mark Waid, Kuse
It's a lot of fun... – Chris Claremont, X-Treme X-Men
When the fabled Noah's Ark is unearthed in Turkey, it's up to one determined young soldier to keep its awesome power out of the hands of a twisted psychic and his sadistic cyborg troops.
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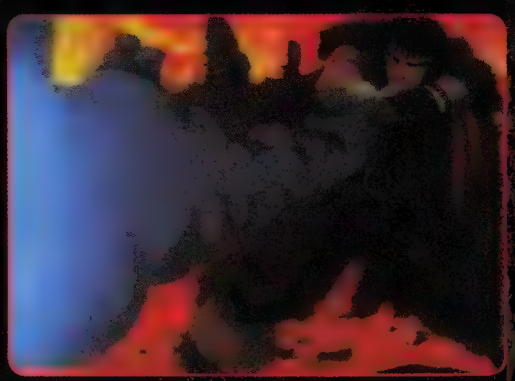
Pain and suffering, ridicule and torment—it's all in a good days work for Guts



If you're one of those people who have dubbed anime "too fruity" for any number of reasons (blue or pink hair, big eyes, or, worse yet, *Tenchi Muyo*) it's time to wake up and smell the plasma. Not that *Berserk* is the first hardcore actionier to grace the Japanese airwaves, but it certainly is one of the best. From its subtle innuendo to its hyper-brutal violence, *Berserk* is a journey through the annals of pain, suffering, torment and revenge; plus, should you crave to delve deeper into the belly of the beast, there's a burning hot Dreamcast game, *The Sword of Berserk: Gut's Rage*, still hanging on hooks at better video-game retailers everywhere.

The first episode begins with more cliche's then both *Rush Hour* movies combined—but sit tight, things heat up soon enough. It's your typical bad-man-makes-cute-girl-lick-booze-off-a-table scenario as a group of garden variety thugs begin to molest a young girl after smacking the wrinkles off of her decrepit, old grand daddy.... But wait! Is that an arrow ripping through your head, tacking you to the wall like a rag doll? Oooh, that's gonna' leave a mark—a big, gaping hole of a mark.

Soon after, we get a glimpse of Gut's torment. As the brand on his neck spills over with blood, an apparition appears to remind him that his body, blood, flesh, and bone belong to them. The who and why will have to wait. Episode one ends as they flash back to Gut's earlier years as a young gladiator, and so it begins.... But not before he guts a demon serpent with his six foot blade—a sword that redefines any verb to do with chopping. Our demo was just that—devoid of any extras or the English dub—but Media Blasters was buttoning it up as we put ink to paper. We'll have the scoops on volume one next **play**.

DAVE HALVERSON

"But wait! Is that an arrow ripping through your head, tacking you to the wall like a rag doll?"

anime previews

BERSERK: WAR CRY (DVD) vol.1

studio: anime works
rating: 13 & up
running time: 125 minutes

A VISION REVISITED

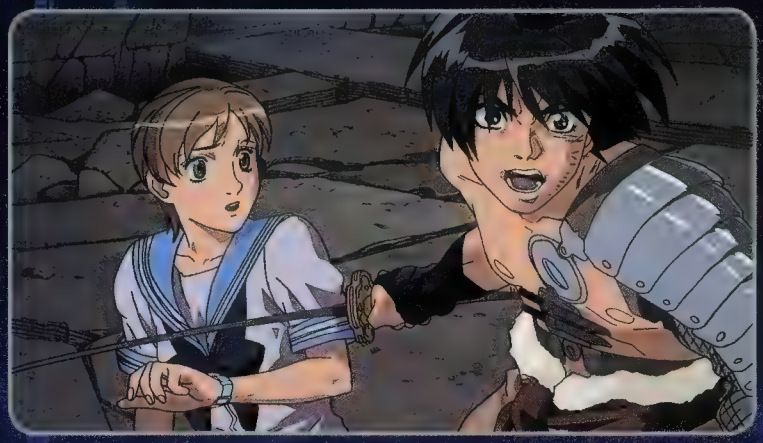
Bandai's *Escaflowne* movie is a beautiful journey into a far away land, now departing from a high school near you...

anime-reviews

ESCAFLOWNE: THE MOVIE (VHS)

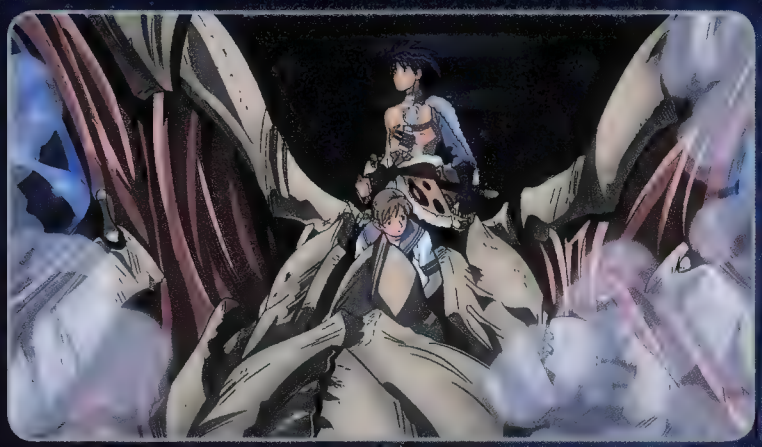
studio: bandai
rating: 13 & up
running time: 110 minutes

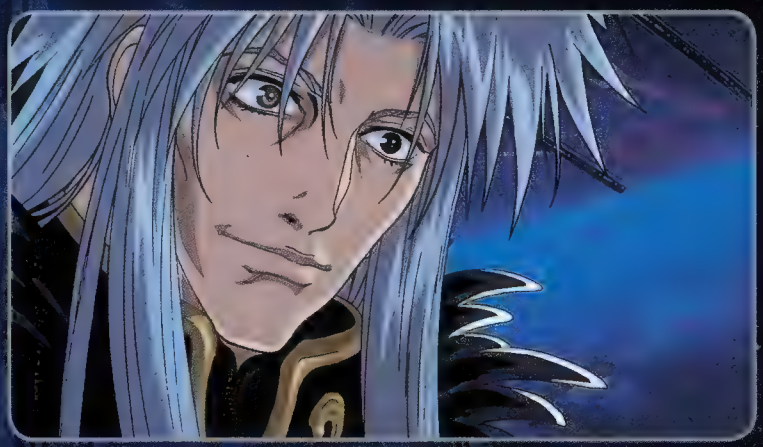
play score



I've been fixated on anime since before Tetsuo spilled his guts, but the past 12 months have been exceptional. With movies like *Blood*, *Spriggan*, *Vampire Hunter D*, *Utena: The Movie*, *Jinroh* and *Metropolis*—and series like *Hand Maid May*, *Vandread*, *Soul Hunter*, *Steel Angels*, *MS 08th* and *Now and Then, Here and There*—all hitting within a year, it's a wonder that anime isn't lining billboards down Sunset Boulevard.... Although the fact that it's not may be a blessing in disguise. Mainstream expectance could change the face of anime, making films like the entrancing *Escaflowne* an endangered species. Here is a movie that, like so many of the very best, derives feeling from what is not said—where the quiet moments resonate as loud as the fierce battles. The story follows the escapades of Hitomi, a misplaced high school girl with an obvious void in her heart, confused about what her life means and what her purpose on Earth is. She's haunted by a feeling that there's something waiting for her on the other side of mortality, but at the same time, conventional thinking makes her seem like maybe she's just a little crazy. We join her life in progress just as she's whisked away by a kindred spirit, transported to Gaia, a world on the brink of extinction—its fate resting on the shoulders of two brothers. Folken, the leader of the Black Dragon Clan and Van (pronounced Vaughn), the would-be king of the world—if only his brother hadn't murdered his family and decimated his Country—both vow for the control of the Wing Goddess. One would resonate with her to finally destroy Gaia, the other revive it. That goddess is Hitomi. There's something so right about watching a beautiful girl in standard issue Japanese school girl dress saving a planet that I can't quite put my finger on—*Escaflowne* is absolutely magical. The layers of this story and events that transpire leading up to the grand conclusion—driven by some of the most amazing character designs and organic mecha ever seen—are as compelling as it gets, making every frame a joy. The animation is stunning overall, and at times, jaw-droppingly fluid (you'll know when). Fans of the series won't be disappointed either. Whether you've seen *Escaflowne* or not, this telling of the story is exquisite, as is every painstakingly drawn frame of animation. Capping off the past year with this spectacular movie—while looking forward to Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*, the *Bebop* film, and *The End of Evangelion*—I'm enjoying a little out of body experience myself. If you're not into anime now, you have my pity. How was *Friends* this week, anyway?

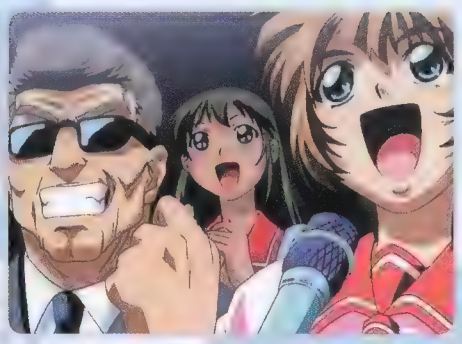
DAVE HALVERSON

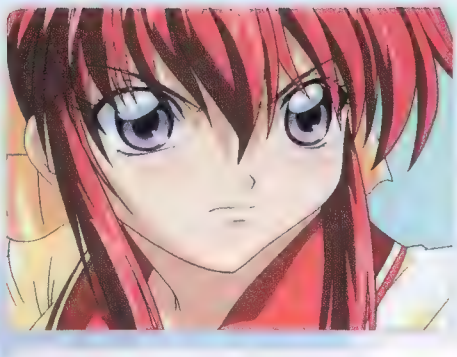




WORTH FIGHTING FOR

TokyoPop's latest acquisition is a series to be reckoned with





...schooltrack

You may not notice (or perhaps *realize* is a better word) by watching *Realbout*, that the soundtrack—obviously a fleshed out compilation derived from the entire series—is in a word, magical. While it does contain a few of the scene derivative fruity-tunes anime soundtracks are often chock full of, it is for the most part a diverse collection of instrumental and vocal laden, Asian pop, rock and ambient. Whether you watch anime or not, I can't recommend this feel-good compilation highly enough.

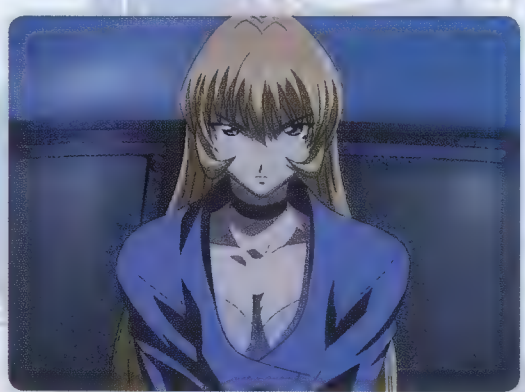
The TokyoPop camp is beginning to really come alive, with their next three acquisitions looking quite spectacular—beginning with *Samurai Girl: Realbout High School*. Featuring characters from renowned designer Keiji Gotoh of *Vandread* fame, and a story with shades of *Utena*, and there's a lot to love before you even Pop open the DVD case.

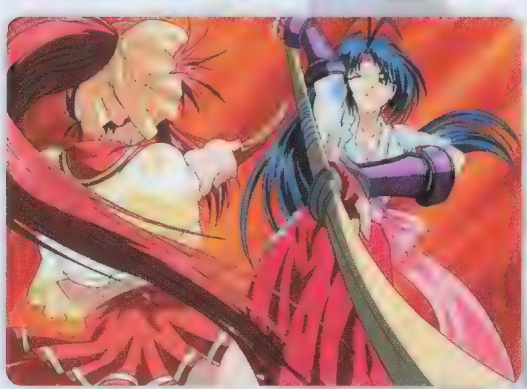
Mitsuragi Sentai is the most popular girl in school, but not because she's cute, or smart, or has a magnetic personality (although she has all of those things), but because she can kick some serious ass. At Diamon High (a private academy) extra curricular activities reign supreme—who's got time to study when there's a K-fight going down? Let me clarify…. At the drop of a hat, the reigning K-fight champion—that would be Mitsuragi—can be challenged to a fight, which simultaneously triggers a live feed broadcasting the event via closed circuit TV campus-wide, with play-by-play by the perky campus queen and analysis by none other than Tikou Toto, the school principal. How many girls do you know that get attacked by a team of ninjas before first period? Exactly.

As if that's not enough intrigue for one day, Mitsuragi is mysteriously transported to a parallel universe after a K-fight and made to go toe-to-tail with a massive dragon. Is she also the Demon Lord of Yemin? Or was it all a dream? No time to dwell on that plot point because the guy she beat down to win the crown—the uppity Shizuma Kusanagi—has returned to school vowing revenge. Before the volume one's credits roll, the plot thickens as the players in this crazy saga begin to take their places. Master swordsman, evil syndicates, and surprising new allies all join the fray and a promising new series is born. Oh, and be on the lookout for a little cameo from your favorite *Street Fighter* babes.

The *Samurai Girl* DVD itself is an impressive amalgam. TokyoPop is setting quite a precedent with *Samurai Girl*, as anime DVDs are notorious for being bare-boned. Four featurettes, covering everything from photo shoots to voice actor interviews, along with original TV promos from Japan, cap off 100 minutes of solid entertainment. With *Samurai Girl* off to an impressive start, I can hardly wait for *Initial D* and *Reign*, both of which are previewed on the disc as well. TokyoPop has found its groove.

DAVE HALVERSON





anime-reviews

REALBOUT HIGH SCHOOL (DVD) vol.1

studio: TokyoPop
rating: 13 & up
running time: 100 minutes

EXTRA GOODS:
Outtakes, translator's notes, motion menus, trailers, (4) making-of featurettes, original TV promotional commercials from Japan, English subtitles, dual language

play score ●●●●○

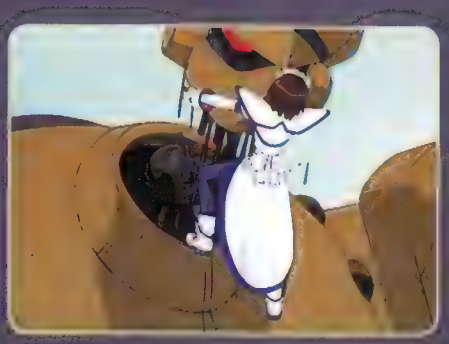
TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL

Few anime can wear as many hats as *Steel Angel Kurumi* and have them all look so good. Exhibiting the quality of a first-tier ADV production, it's put together extremely well, from the seamless voice-over, to the extras and overall presentation—it's an anime series not to be missed. When you pick up volume one, you can be confident that you won't be sorry down the road. It's almost immediately evident that *Steel Angel Kurumi* is going somewhere great—somewhere you'll definitely want to tag along.

Viewing *Steel Angel* for the first time, some parallels will inevitably be drawn. Nakahito finds Kurumi much like Otaru found Lime in *Saber Marionette J*, and like Spielberg/Kubrick's *A.I.*, once you imprint an Angel, she's pretty much yours for life—whether you like it or not (for the record, in this case, I'd like it very much). There's even the splintered team of scientists, picked out of countless sci-fi plots, that take their creation and head for the hills when they discover the military's intentions—to use there discovery as a weapon of mass destruction (one has to question why scientists accept government funding in the first place, seeing as how this always happens). All of these parallels begin to slowly melt away as *SAK*'s clever mix of drama, action and super-deformed comedy begin to permeate the screen.

Things get underway when Professor Amagi, the Angel's creator, is found out, held up in a demonic doctor's mansion, where urban legend has it the former resident dissected a live girl and saved her head (which still screams in agony) in a jar. Amagi is in possession of two Angels, Kurumi and Saki, and the Imperial Army wants them back. The only stage left in the Angels at this point, oddly enough, is how to turn them on. Unlike most Androids, Angels contain elements of both science and spirituality. The idea is to give them a sense of mortality—of being alive, having both heart and soul (later on this will prove to make the series all the more compelling, I'm sure). Amagi's enlisted the help of a gifted Mystic, Kamahito, to work on this process, but before you can say "go-go-gadget," Kamahito's little brother, the 11-year-old mystic-in-training, Nakahito, is being forced to break in to the house by a pack of neighborhood bullies to retrieve the infamous jar. Of course, Nakahito finds much, much more stumbling across

"It's almost immediately evident that *Steel Angel Kurumi* is going somewhere great"



Kurumi just as the military's massive robots pull up to do a spot of excavation, causing the Earth to shake and Kurumi to slump forward just enough for their lips to accidentally meet. Kurumi is mysteriously activated and an 11-year-old boy inherits a super weapon with a burning hot bod and a slave mentality. One question: Why can't it be me? Anyhow, you can see the paradox. Provided your over 13, the first thing that comes to mind is—sex slave! But Nakashita's a troubled 11-year-old with bigger fish to fry and seems to care less to the point that he doesn't even want to be bothered with her (even when his head is nudged between her ample breasts)! Initially, you want to ring his neck—a whimpier worm of a lead character you've never seen—but by the end of volume one, he's okay. Besides, Kurumi soon inherits a lesbian love interest that makes you forget all about Nakahito!

DAVE HALVERSON

anime-reviews

STEEL ANGEL KURUMI (DVD) vol.1

studio: ADV Films
rating: 17 & up
running time: 60 minutes

EXTRA GOODS:
This one is loaded: "Conversations with Angels" (behind-the-scenes), historical background, "The Onmyou Tradition," production sketches, translator notes, "Kurumi Fortune Teller," extended episode previews and "clean" opening animation

play score

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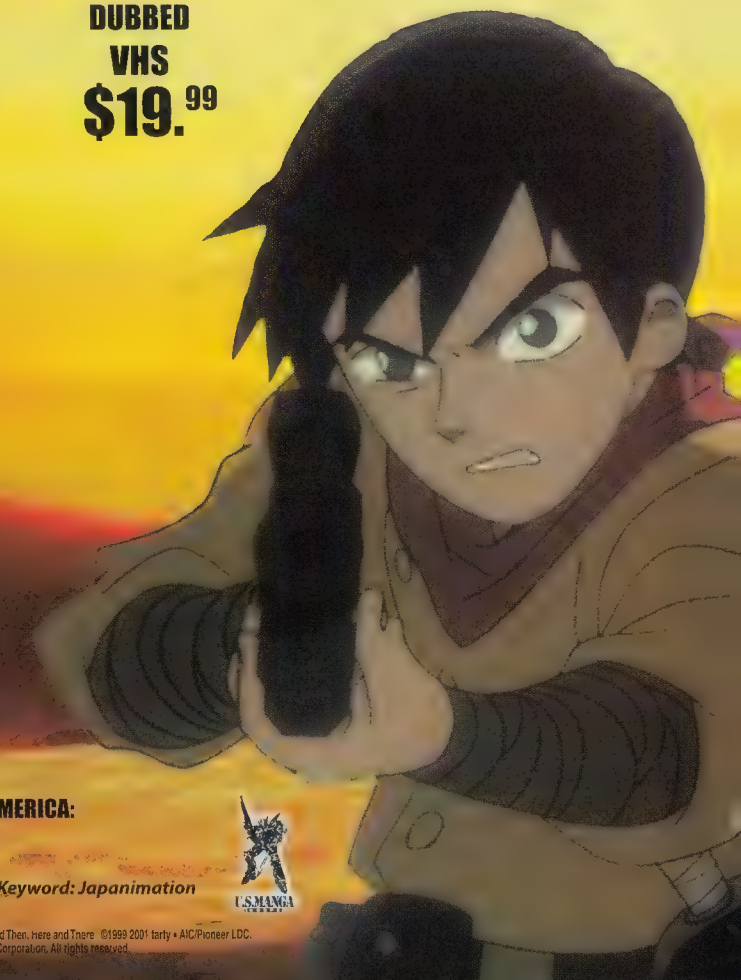

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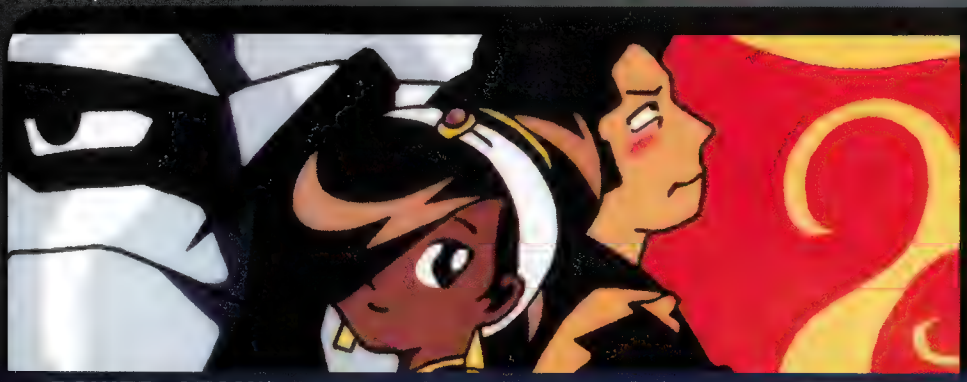
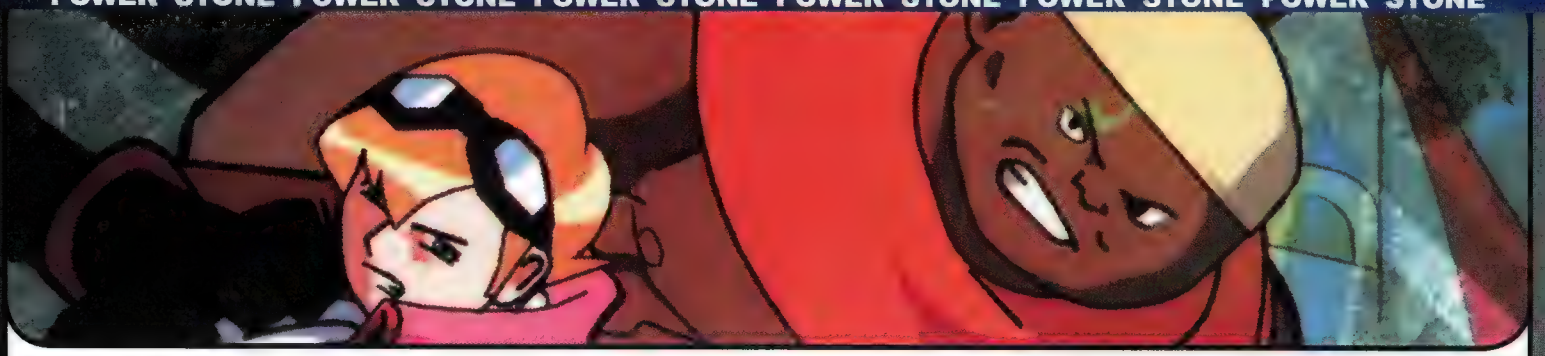


POP ROCKS

Capcom's ace arena fighter, *Power Stone*, continues its roll as an anime series.

POWER STONE POWER STONE POWER STONE POWER STONE POWER STONE POWER STONE



If you watch *Power Stone* long enough, it actually starts to grow on you, in a cornball retro sort of way. Settling into its Saturday morning format and reoccurring plot lines, it shifts from your anime brain to that old *Johnny Quest*/*Scooby Doo* side where silly cartoons from your childhood reside. *Scooby Doo* looks like crap, so does *The Flintstones*, but did you ever miss an episode?

Okay, so that's not exactly what I (or you likely) prefer in a video-game-inspired anime—especially one with characters designed by Capcom—but it is what it is. If you're still watching *Power Stone*, you've already swallowed this pill anyway, so I'll cut to the chase.

Making there way from Sun Land to Fire Land—Rouge's home town—the song remains pretty much the same, as it does in Gold Land, Moon Land and any other Land that has a stone in it. The plot dejour is to find Pride, Falcon's father, and learn more about the Power Stones. Tagging along, Ryoma still just wants to fight Falcon to hone his skills against another Power Stone Warrior and please his sensei. Meanwhile, Rouge's infatuation with Ryoma continues to grow, as Falcon's does for Rouge, although it turns out it's Ayame who has the hots for Falcon (even though she's, like, 12). She must be older in cartoon years. Love interests aside, over the next nine episodes both girls obtain their Power Stones and band together with Falcon, Ryoma and the newest member, Gunrock, a very large man who thinks he may have inadvertently killed Falcon's father (fat chance—he's off eating dumplings). Of course, where ever they go, Kraken's goons, Octo and Puss, follow—and so it goes, "Power Stone!"

While minimally animated, the producers do make good use of color, layered panning stills, and once in great awhile, actually animate something smoothly.

When all is said and done, I'd rather sit through a silly Saturday morning sitcom than stomach another decade-old giant robot story or seedy, super-team horse hockey. Viewed for what it is, a silly Saturday morning cartoon, *Power Stone* is okay by me

DAVE HALVERSON

anime-reviews

POWER STONE (DVD) volumes 3 & 4

studio: ADV Films
rating: 12 & up
running time: 100 minutes each

EXTRA GOODS:
ADV previews

play score

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Z-Mind (DVD) vol.1

BANDAI ENTERTAINMENT
13 & UP • 150 MINS

"[Z-Mind is] so contrived and boring, it's nearly impossible to watch."

play rating

Exciting event comes in big pack isn't necessarily a good sentence when it comes to anime, but Z-Mind is such a bland gem-ruby ass that hardly it seems out of place in the impressive Bandai roster. Teaching any science from 13 to 18 makes DiDi's head hurt. I've warmed to mes with even the lowest expectations, finding at least shades of character design appreciation, art or any number of creative or design aspects. I love animation anything pretty much, and respect what animation studios and 2-D producers do more than I can possibly say. In Z-Mind's case, however, I can find no redeeming qualities. The character designs, artistry and animation are all overwhelming drab.

Set in the 21st (I think) century by the son of the series' gloomy and fat cop, sisters Ayumi, Renge, Sumire and the titular Satsuki (the youngest), are drawn into Z-Mind's nascent organisation backed by the U.S. and Japan Governments—on call to stop a freaky case of alien invaders from taking over the world. The girls' former was involved in the Z-Mind's giant robot development 12 years prior, when he mysteriously vanished with the scientist's sister/girlfriend and as a result was mad to the death against both the wife—in a related incident, making the girls orphans. Now 12 years later, living with their uncle, and getting along quite well, the girls are called to arms when the aliens decide to emerge back through their wormhole attack and give it another go.

It's unloved and boring, it's nearly impossible to watch. I suspect reactions past Z-Mind and going as Dandies Mr Lim or Pilot Dashboard, but all Bandai's latest and greatest.

DAVE HALVERSON

Orphen (DVD) vol.4

ADV FILMS
13 & UP • 125 MINS

"In one battle in particular, they replay the same menu screen loop about a hundred times..."

play rating

If you care at all about Orphen, and about this series, do yourself a favor and skip chapter 10 altogether. Apparently, there was a plague of some kind at the studio, and the janitors were called in to draw, animate, and cut it to music. In one battle in particular, they replay the menu screen loop about a hundred times, and it looks and is animated so poorly you can barely make out it's Orphen. A big fan of this series, I thought it was goodbye forever. You can't imagine how relieved I was when chapter 11 began, looking as good as ever. Not that Orphen's big-budget anime, but it does have a distinct style that makes up for the limitations that apply to all anime alone. Anyway, Stephenie's killing Doll is vanquished—she turns out to be a homunculus—and Cleao, Magic and Orphen finally move on.

Chapter 11 is a touchy-feely interlude centering around Cleao's role, cuddly and lovingly demonic critter. Lucky, but it yields on the title's relationship (it appears Orphen now actually cares about Cleao and Majic) and Volfarn's (Cleao's ingly sinister disposition—as he graduates from harmless distraction to complete bastard status. Moving on, the producers finally begin to cut to the chase as we're soon faced with Orphen's inevitable return to the Tower of Fang. After a brutal attack by The Bloody Aspect (Orphen's Azalie), their defenses are down, giving Orphen and company access to the archives, and possibly the spell to free Azalie from her increasingly hideous reptilian prison. We also get a sooo new opening with chapter 14 and witness the majestic Black Tiger and his massive and powerful Oc Cleopha!

Within this, the most compelling framework since volume one, Vivian OCs on inconsistent and nearly lose Cleao/gets a personality and a story-line, Orphen saves an entire town, Cleao takes a bath ;) and the lower elders call in a new disciple, Flamehaze, to eliminate Orphen. Azalie and, if necessary, Chitchmen. The plot finally thickens!

DAVE HALVERSON

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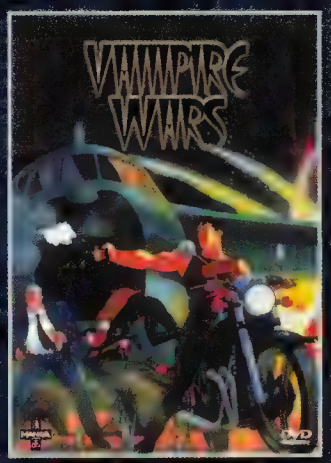

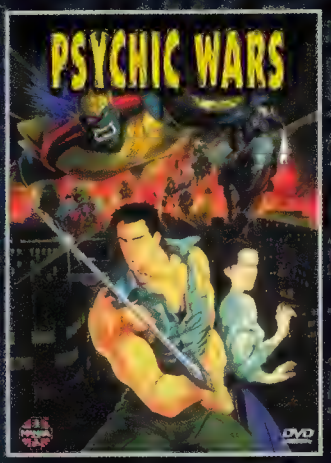

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Gundam - MS Gundam 8 DVD 'The Battle of Solomon' - Bandai 4/9/02
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Sailor Moon DVD 1 'A Heroine is Chosen' - ADV 4/16/02
Sailor Moon DVD 2 'Sailor Scouts to the Rescue' - ADV 4/16/02
Golden Boy DVD 1 'Treasure Hunt' - ADV 4/23/02
Gundam 0080 War in the Pocket DVD 2 - Bandai 4/23/02
Love Hina DVD 2 'Go West!' - Bandai 4/23/02
Metropolis DVD - Columbia 4/23/02
Nadia, Secret of Blue Water 8 DVD 'The Secret Cave' ADV - 4/23/02
Saber Marionette J to X DVD 1 - Bandai 4/23/02
Sherlock Hound 2 DVD - Pioneer 4/23/02
SoulTaker 2 DVD 'Flickering Faith' - Pioneer 4/23/02
Spriggan DVD - ADV 4/23/02
Berserk 1 DVD 'War Cry' - AnimeWorks 4/30/02
Lupin III 'Secret of the Twilight Gemini' DVD Fuimation - 4/30/02
Magic User's Club TV 4 DVD 'Should I Do?' AnimeWorks - 4/30/02
Medabots DVD 1 'Transport Metabee!' - ADV 4/30/02
Ronin Warriors DVD 1 - Bandai 4/30/02
Rurouni Kenshin TV 17 DVD 'Holy War' - AnimeWorks 4/30/02
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Dragon Ball Z 63 DVD Majin Buu 'Defiance' Funimation - 5/7/02
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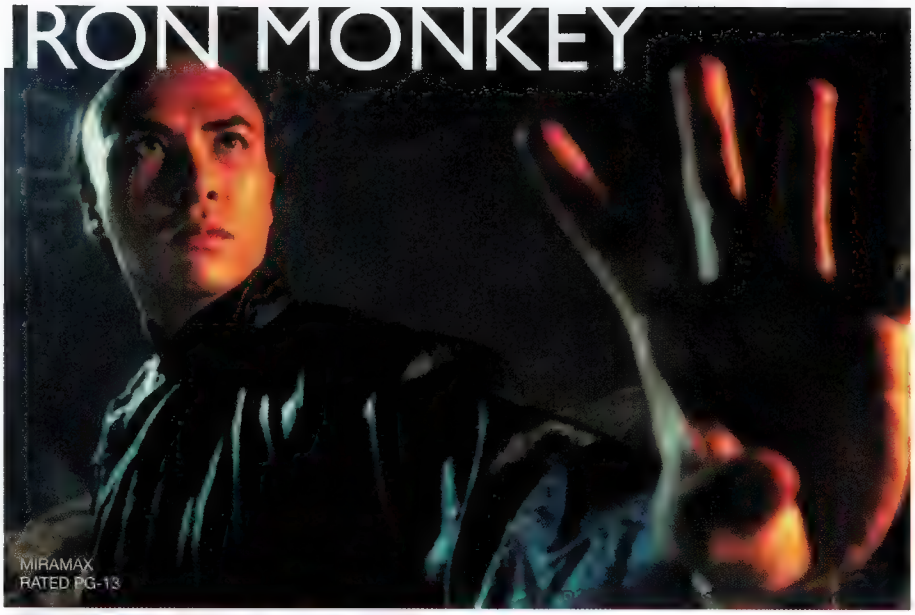

MIRAMAX
RATED PG-13

PLAY: Kung fu is a monster generally unknown to U.S. shores. No offense to *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*—which effectively shows off the artistry of Asian cinema on a beginner level—but Americans don't know what they're missing. Indeed, *Crouching Tiger* is an important movie, and it doesn't back down when spinning in the air on wires or drawing a few tears. Yet, it's ultimately just a drama; true kung fu spectacle, in all it's battered glory, is much more than that. Like our other featured import this month, Jackie Chan's *Drunken Master* (pg.99), the genre that exploded in the 70s and seemed to disappear quickly thereafter (at least in the States), is rooted in more than pure sentiment—it's about comedy, honor, love, wisdom, death, and the action that binds it all together. But to unravel the essence of the art, the Asian culture must be analyzed. Family, first off, has a certain spiritual weight, as well as the subservient view of sexism. (Notice how women are nearly always dismissed as pawns, as window dressing, in movies. In reality—or at least in the fantasy/reality of the film world—they are the passive aggressor.) The Asian cinema mentality, since it is constructed for a wide variety of incomes throughout the Far East continent, is that the audience isn't looking for a "thriller" or a "comedy." Movie tickets aren't cheap; so the kung fu market supplies the whole spectrum. The emotion flexes fast—one minute you're weeping, the next you're laughing—but films like *Iron Monkey* are intentionally built to twist to those extremes in order to excite their target demo. American moviegoers, to a large extent, generally walk into a multiplex expecting one-shot, single-serving entertainment. So take that knowledge and apply it to *Iron Monkey*. It's a basic story, one that is equal parts Robin Hood and Chinese folk lure, yet it still roars from the first frame to the last. The choreography is incredible, the legend is mystical, and it's exhaustively, undeniably pure.

VALUE: Believe it or not, Quentin Tarantino is a self-admitted connoisseur of the martial arts complex. He's been collecting film prints for years, but *Iron Monkey* is his first effort to bring the genre to the mainstream—or a facet therein. He lends a compelling, fairly lengthy interview to the special features roster, clamoring about his passion for director Yuen Wo Ping (the whirlwind force behind the action in *The Matrix*) and the history of his personal obsession with Asian tour-de-punches. Donnie Yen, currently moonlighting in domestic theaters in *Blade II*, also offers up his martial arts background in another interview—though, it's considerably shorter than Tarantino's memos. A decent disc, but a full-length commentary by Mr. Brown would have been a treat.

JON M GIBSON

movie ● ● ● ● ●
dvd ● ● ● ● ●

HEIST

WARNER BROS.
RATED R

PLAY: "My mother f——'s so cool, when he goes to bed, sheep count him," assures a smooth as silk Ricky Jay to a nervous Sam Rockwell, as Gene Hackman, in the backdrop, plays the aggressive liar—and is successful in fooling a State Police officer. It's all part of the con, a big-shot gold robbery worth millions—and, of course, the snap and crackle of writer/director David Mamet's dialogue. He pens bushels of hip, edgy lines for his actors in *every* scene—it's not a one-time deal like Schwarzenegger generally lauds at the climax of his action pictures ("I'm a cop, you idiot!"). Adding to the dramatic sandwich, Mamet always manages to screw in so many taut, swirling plot-pretzels that your eyes, ears and mind are rendered under his control. Basically, though, under all the veneer and flash, *Heist* is an old-school crime caper just like *The Score* could have been; but where *The Score* breaks to roll credits, *Heist* keeps going and going and going.

VALUE: For how intricate this feisty flick actually is, it's surprising that Mamet or any of his actors aren't spewing random antidotes on an audio track. Instead, we get a theatrical trailer. It's embarrassing.

JON M GIBSON

movie ● ● ● ● ●
dvd ● ● ● ● ●

SAMURAI JACK

WARNER BROS.
NOT RATED

PLAY: When *Samurai Jack* premiered last autumn on Cartoon Network with this meditated three-part "movie," it was a breakthrough in animation. In the cartoon landscape, there has never been anything quite like it. Here, we witness the origin of Jack, from nimble youth training to noble, grown-up samurai, as he prepares to fence the lurking, sinister shadow demon, Aku, to the death. It's a tale of revenge, one that begins as Jack's father is murdered by the vile creature of hell. But during their first encounter, the good guy is warped into the distant future, a land in which the bad guy is emperor supreme (with a presence infinitely larger than Bill Gates). Likewise, Samurai Jack only gets better beyond this plot-setting premiere. Each episode that follows further defines the state of cool. There is a gangster-themed heist and a rope bridge face-off between Jack and a bagpipe-playing, Scottish swordsman. Cross your fingers for more episodes on DVD soon.

VALUE: Creator Genndy Tartakovsky, the pencil behind *Dexter's Laboratory* and co-creator of *Powerpuff Girls*, lends his insight to the featurette, "Behind the Sword," logging the production of the show from Day One.

ET COHEN

movie ● ● ● ● ●
dvd ● ● ● ● ●

NEWSBYTES

edited by et cohen

. . . It's the next generation of Jar-Jar: Director Peter Jackson told the *New York Post* that **an entirely computer-generated character named Gollum will play a major roll in the next *Lord of the Rings*** sequel . . . Rev your engines: French director Luc Besson's next project will be translating the high-octane adventures of race car comic book hero, Michel Valliant, onto celluloid . . . Natural born warrior: After several years of silence, **Oliver Stone announced that he will begin production on an Alexander the Great project starring Heath Ledger** this October in India, beating Ridley Scott, Martin Scorcese and a 10-episode HBO mini-series to an epic about the Macedonian ruler . . . Ain't got no digital love:

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

20th CENTURY FOX
RATED PG-13

PLAY: When the only box quote available for a movie is "an adrenaline-pumping action ride" or "a celebration of the American can-do spirit," veer far, far away. It's a clear warning—very direct. And as a tribute to *Behind Enemy Lines*, a tale of military survival and chain of command, would you really want to disobey an order—well, more like a suggestion? Not to say that director John Moore (famous for helming TV commercials) didn't have a substantial concept on his plate—but a poor script, odd casting choices and a destructive editing technique will turn any project upside down. His style is innovative—at least when applied to a wartime action flick—but it's much too brisk to make even an Owen Wilson fanboy care about his character. There is absolutely no attachment—no depth—to any one person in the movie. But I can admit this: It had cool missiles.

VALUE: If replaying the dogfight between Navy jet and foreign projectiles wasn't enough, Moore and editor Martin Smith sat down to talk about their unique visual approach on a separate audio track—which, sadly, is *actually* an interesting listen.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●○○○
dvd ●●●○○

DRUNKEN MASTER

COLUMBIA TRISTAR
NOT RATED

PLAY: In Asia, director Yuen Wo Ping is the crowned king of martial arts. His fighting mode is easily recognizable—he has the kind of hyper creativity in his craft that most people strive for all their lives. At times, his action is enjoyably silly, slapped with physical human and casual smacks; and in darker moments, when the intensity picks up, he incites his actors to move as if they were puppets on a uncountable clutch of strings. Yet, most of the time, especially in *Drunken Master*, everything onscreen is raw talent. Another factoid for the books: Both Wo Ping and Jackie Chan, playing a mischievous class clown, flowered to mad stardom after this film landed in Hong Kong theaters. Undoubting, it has aged considerably, but if you want to experience the roots of kung fu comedy, *Drunken Master* can't be ignored.

VALUE: For such an archive piece, it's refreshing to see that Columbia tapped author Ric Meyers for an audio commentary on what he knows best: Hong Kong cinema. This is one of those rare audio tracks that acts as a double-edged sword: It's an enjoyment to listen, and an education.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●○○
dvd ●●●●○

SPY GAME

UNIVERSAL
RATED R

PLAY: Here's a triple-decker worth biting into: Robert Redford, Brad Pitt and Tony Scott on the same credit list. It's all wrapped together with one giant blunder when CIA operative Tom Bishop (Pitt) is captured and sentenced to die while on an unauthorized mission. The timer is set—24 hours—before the execution, so it's up to veteran agent Nathan Muir (Redford) to recover his one-time student. Unfortunately, for a spy thriller of this caliber, the pace is excruciatingly slow. Most intoxicating is Redford as he fumbles about the CIA office on his last day before retirement. He looks like an innocent, but as the plot progresses, he abuses the very government he works for in some *very* devious ways. With a predictable payoff and an ending set against a Far East sunset, *Spy Game* is a movie that will inarguably get dusty on your DVD rack.

VALUE: But there's no stopping this disc from trying. "Over 10 hours," the back cover shouts, with bullet points on two audio commentaries, and a handful of other extras. But you'd have to care about the film enough to entertain a full workday of supplements, now wouldn't you?

ET COHEN

movie ●●●○○
dvd ●●●●○

THE ATOMIC CAFE

DOCURAMA
NOT RATED

PLAY: Where do you find your humor? Is it in the boisterous, booming antics of Jim Carrey's Fire Marshal Bill, or in the truly perverse? *The Atomic Café* challenges the American institution of comedy with a no-frills documentary that, to the most extreme sense, is 100% true. What's fascinating is how filmmakers Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader and Pierce Rafferty approached the subject of nuclear terror. Instead of serving up a bland entrée of cold-war era newscasts, they raided government archives, dug up military training films, and resurrected tons of propaganda rarely seen. It all weaves together into a no-holds, 88-minute surge of dark comedy. Witness boy scouts in scratchy newsreel footage give instructions on how to maintain an atomic fallout shelter; but that's only half of it. There are moments, too, which may ignite some doubt—should we really be laughing? On a whole, it's different than *Reefer Madness*, though, as *Atomic Café* was constructed with a witty, uncompromising sense of disbelief in mind.

VALUE: As it celebrates a 20th Anniversary, there isn't much of a party: interactive menus and scene selection. Too bad.

ET COHEN

movie ●●●○○
dvd ●○○○○

TRAINING DAY

WARNER BROS.
RATED R

PLAY: Alonzo Harris is a cop that holds his barrels sideways and fires without blinking. If his pistol is drawn, you shake—fear flows through your every vein, your every vessel. And it's Denzel Washington, in his Oscar-nabbing performance, who transforms into the L.A.P.D. miscreant—a character that is so brutal, so blunt, that you can't tear your eyes away. He's a modern day fairy tale character that says everything you wish you could. He's as rude as he wants to be; he's as cruel as he wants to be. And even though he carries that fairy tale persona—one that is indelibly smooth—the streets of L.A. on which *Training Day* is set are *very* real. Tossing a rookie desk jockey into the picture (Ethan Hawke) only intensifies the mood. It's a far cry from wholesome family entertainment.

VALUE: After fumbling through two music videos (Nelly's "#1" and Pharoahe Monch's "Got You"), spend some time with director Antoine Fuqua as he commentates on his most prestigious work to date. *The Replacement Killers* was stylish, *Bait* merely okay—but *Training Day* is his street creed epic of blood and sparks. Engage it.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●●○
dvd ●●●○○

Producer Rick McCallum stated that **by the time *Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones* arrives in theaters on May 16, only 27 theaters in the country will be able to project it digitally**—a rotten shame, seeing as the big-budget prequel is the first film of its caliber to be shot entirely with digital cameras . . . Don't touched the man in the suit: **Producers of the Canadian kid's show, *Ricky's Room*, are suing Warner Bros.** over the similarity of the Ricky the Rhino and Smoochy in Danny DeVito's dark comedy, *Death to Smoochy*. Apparently, there is a fear that kids might confuse Edward Norton's character as Canadian—which he obviously isn't. Isn't that the sad, sad truth, eh? . . . Don't upset Regis: Recently, **on an international edition of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, a Thai woman confessed to cheating.** Apparently her monitor was receiving a master studio feed with the answers to each question on display. After confessing, Regis slapped her with his own brand of designer ties and took his…er…the show's money back . . . And the trophy goes to: Tom Green made history over Oscar weekend—well, kinda. **He was the first winner of the Golden Raspberry for "Worst Picture of the Year" to actually show up and accept his award.** Green also took home the trophy for "Worst Actor" and "Worst Director" for *Freddie Got Fingered*. Mariah Carry declined to show up to except him award for "Worst Actress" in *Glitter*.

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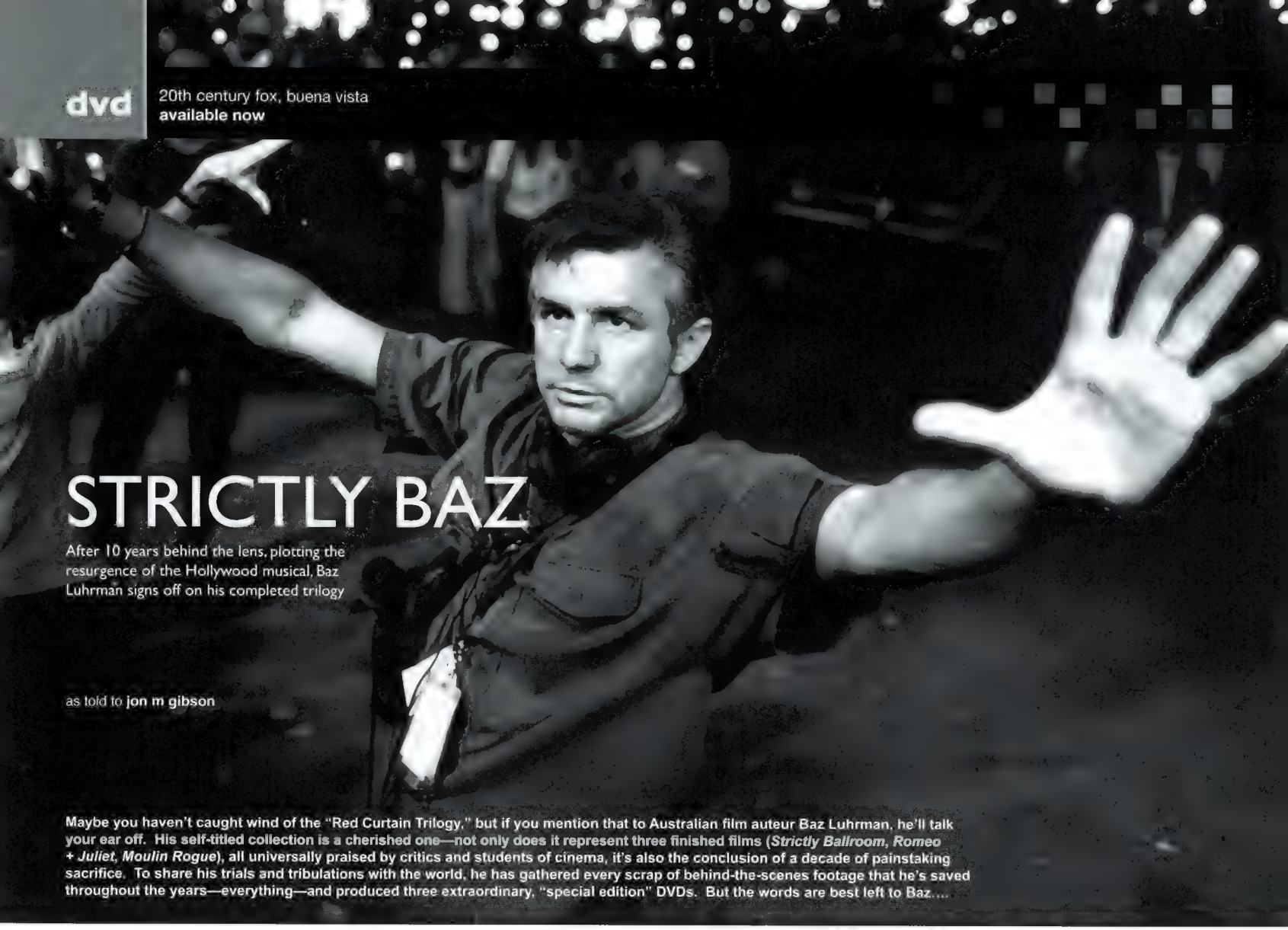

STRICTLY BAZ

After 10 years behind the lens, plotting the resurgence of the Hollywood musical, Baz Luhrman signs off on his completed trilogy

as told to **jon m gibson**

Maybe you haven't caught wind of the "Red Curtain Trilogy," but if you mention that to Australian film auteur Baz Luhrman, he'll talk your ear off. His self-titled collection is a cherished one—not only does it represent three finished films (*Strictly Ballroom, Romeo + Juliet, Moulin Rogue*), all universally praised by critics and students of cinema, it's also the conclusion of a decade of painstaking sacrifice. To share his trials and tribulations with the world, he has gathered every scrap of behind-the-scenes footage that he's saved throughout the years—everything—and produced three extraordinary, "special edition" DVDs. But the words are best left to Baz....

So you've finally finished your trilogy.
I've come into the end of a 10-year journey, of which *Strictly Ballroom, Romeo + Juliet* and *Moulin Rogue* belong. It's about a particular kind of cinematic language. All three films belong to it. It's about the ability to take a very simple myth, set it in a heightened creative world, use a device—whether it's dance, iambic pentameter, breaking out into song—to keep the audience always aware that they're watching a movie. It's not naturalism in any way. And that journey has finally led to *Moulin Rogue*. Which has been a focus to reinvent musical cinema.

Are you pleased with the DVD format—it seems like it's now the virtual archive for all things Luhrman?
I love the DVD format. I truly believe in it. I was very against video—I thought it reduced the experience. DVD is a form of its own; I think we've only seen the tip of an iceberg.

So how do you feel about filmmakers like Peter Hyams, who claim they would rather have "the film speak for itself?"
Well, don't push the button, is what I would say. Buy the DVD, run the film, and don't go near that other section—you don't have to look at it. If you have a relationship with a film you love, the fact that you see David Lean talk about [*Laurence of Arabia*]—to me—deepens my relationship with the film.

So where does your "cinematic journey" begin and end?
The film begins the moment that I articulate the story. The moment I say, "Well, I'm thinking about," I can't sleep for 10 years. It's a 10-year journey that I've been on and I'm about to conclude it. That's why I'm *very*, *very* focused on putting that story into a disc. The actual film itself exists—it is finished, it is done. None of the movies have been touched. When Francis Ford Coppola did the *Redux* [of *Apocalypse Now*], I can completely understand that. But to me, I'm particularly obsessed with chronology and rhythm. It's not about extending the length of the film, to me. But it is about the possibility of adding depth. It's what I call "horizontal expansion" to the storytelling.

There was a lot of criticism about you denigrating the works of Shakespeare when *Romeo + Juliet* was originally released.
Well, I had a long relationship with Shakespeare; I've been deeply involved with Shakespeare all my life. Actually, for all of its pop acceptance, this film was a journey for me of examining, in a very meticulous way, the question, "If Shakespeare were making a movie, how would he go about it?" For that reason, we spent two years alone stripping away all the fake mythology about Shakespeare and doing an academic research on the Elizabethan stage of Shakespeare. Every idea, for example, in the film is a direct result of an Elizabethan play. Would do I mean by that? Shakespeare would put pop music in his productions. He would take "hey, ditty ditty" or something that was hot on the streets, because that would connect the audience. He would use topical subjects—broad comedy cut with high tragedy. [The film] was absolutely driven by Shakespeare. We would cut, we would shift structure, but we would not change a word.

Let's talk about spectacle. All of your films incorporate a vast, uncompromising size—a celebration, of sorts—in one way or another.
Basically, spectacle is a mechanism. It's primary, it's universal, it's fundamental. In the language of cinema, *Laurence of Arabia*—it's not about spectacle. Now, of course, how do you show the power, the poetry and the emotion. Lean uses what I would call the "poetic spectacle." In [*Romeo + Juliet*], you're quite right. It's like, let's wake the audience up—let's engage them in the energy and the aggression of the scene. So you engage spectacle.

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words by jon [illegible]

"F—k." Remember it: That's the slogan for *The Osbournes*.

Whether it's daughter Kelly and son Jack bickering, or Ozzy attempting to use the coffee maker, it's used as a verb, adjective, and noun—in the Osbourne household, "f—k" is basically the equivalent of an "um" or "eh." It's unavoidable, really. Even while watching the show, you'll probably be compelled to say "f—k" a few times, during commercial breaks or in sing-along mode, as the drama of each episode unfolds. And to think, MTV is the barer of this runaway hit.

"We had various meetings with [Ozzy's wife], Sharon, and the kids. Not with necessarily the intention of this show in mind, just to keep an open dialogue," Greg Johnston, Executive Producer, offers. "Sharon was interested in doing something; they had a great experience with *Cribs*. So we just had exploratory dinners, and every time Sharon would tell these stories of things that happened the night before. And they always had us howling with laughter."

It's an intriguing concept: Take a world-renowned rockstar notorious for his clunky history with drugs, alcohol and sex—which, on a scale of addiction, Ozzy would probably score an "eleven"—and put a camera on him. "Ozzy can't show off to the camera—he really can't. He is who he is," Johnston laughs. "If the cameras are there or if they're not, he is the same person. There's no pretension. There's no difference." Couple his larger-than-life persona with the rousing antics of daily family life, and you've got the formula for success.

No extreme budgets, no pyrotechnics (a least not intended explosions). Everything is shot a la cinema verte, wherein every session unfolds freely in front of the lens. One episode pits Ozzy against the satellite TV remote. And it's not the fact that he can't program the gadget that's entertaining, it's the chain reaction that follows. His frustration begins as he punches random buttons. Quickly, the cursing begins. Then Jack is hailed to aid the situation. Ozzy wants to watch The History Channel—but can't. And the havoc is all because the installation technician claimed "the instruction booklet wasn't necessary."

Or try on a later episode, in which the neighbors won't turn the dial down on their stereo. They don't appreciate the Osbournes much because of the massive demon head they have bolted to the front door. Aggravated, Sharon rockets an uncooked ham into their yard. The police investigate; sirens roar. All the while, Ozzy lie unconscious on the couch. But when the music starts again, and the king of the household is awake, he smashes a log through the neighbor's closest window.

"They're a real family," Johnston assures us, even if there are *many* bizarre circumstances to take into account. "I think everybody can identify with the characters. Whether you're a 12-year-old that can identify with the kids or a 60-year-old that can identify with Ozzy as a father in having to deal with normal, family situations. There aren't any reality comedy shows out there."

But the continuing popularity of *The Osbournes* begs the question: Will MTV follow in the spin-off footsteps of *That 80's Show*? "I don't know if you'd get that same thing with another family—with the McCartneys."

Enjoy the mayhem while it lasts.

"IF THE CAMERAS ARE THERE OR NOT, [OZZY] IS THE SAME PERSON. THERE'S NO PRETENSION. THERE'S NO DIFFERENCE"

—Greg Johnston, Executive Producer, *The Osbournes*

dinotopia
abc sunday, may 12 **7:00pm (ct/et)**

LOST EMPIRE

Armed with $85 million and two years of production time, the fantasy world of Dinotopia comes to life just in time for the 10th anniversary of the book

In this world, the mythical realm of Dinotopia—a land of infinite fantasy—dinosaurs are not the man-eating tyrant lizards of Jurassic Park. In fact, they speak.

"I [drew] a single map of one island, where all of these lost empires existed, and then came up with the idea where this could be an island where humans and dinosaurs lived together," James Gurney, author of the *Dinotopia* series of painted novels, illustrates. "And instead of the dinosaurs being beasts of burden, they're the ones, in a way, who have domesticated the people."

Although, under the lens, Gurney's original concept is reflecting more modern sensibilities. The 1860s setting that was written about in his first book has since been brushed aside, allowing room for a 21st century update. But it's still classic adventure, in the vein of a Jules Verne epic: After their small plane crashes in the Caribbean, and their father drowns, teenaged sons Karl (Tyron Leitso) and David (Wentworth Miller) swim to shore, only to discover that they are castaways on a lost continent. In addition to their constant rivalry, they must learn to accept their newfound life—one in which dinosaurs not only exist, but *co*-exist with humans. The giant lizards are both the working class and the scholars. They are the masons; the teachers; the rulers.

"Gurney said that it [was] impossible to make a movie out of it. That was enough, obviously, for me to take the project," smiles Robert Halmi, Sr., Executive Producer of *Dinotopia*. He's the man responsible for all the renowned epics of network TV: *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Odyssey*, *Merlin*, *Moby Dick*.... The list goes on. "I thought that television needs something different than *big*; and I would not call this a miniseries, because there's nothing mini about it—it's a mega-series. The feature world cannot do six hours. The feature world cannot do the things I do—otherwise they couldn't afford it. As is, [*Dinotopia*] cost $85 million for us to do, which is about the same amount of money that the first episode of *Lord of the Rings* cost. And it's for television. I think this is a way to go to get the audience back."

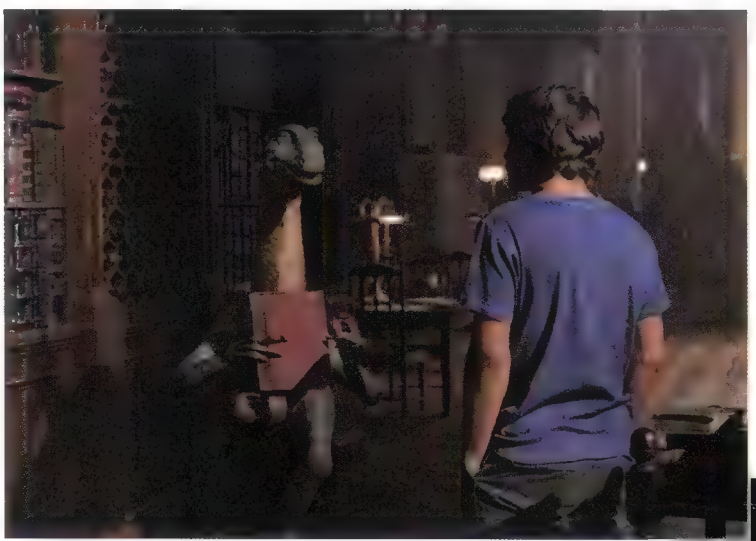
But the massive bankroll wasn't expensed for the cinematic plane crash or the tropical isle setting—it was Waterfall City, where Karl and David are immediately welcomed as the "off-worlders," that sparked such an extreme budget (the most lavish television production ever, actually). Mayor Waldo enrolls them in the capital's academy so they can learn to become Dinotopians. But it quickly becomes apparent that the brothers arrived in the lost city at a crucial moment in its history. The "sunstones," the lifeforce of Dinotopia, are gradually fading. The extinction of the entire kingdom is threatened.

Ultimately, though, this is a special effects extravaganza—one that employees imagery never seen on the small *or* silver screens. The dinosaurs walk among the streets of the city, speak dozens of different languages, and fly amid the clouds.

"The challenge with *Dinotopia* was to actually, one, adorn them, either with costumes or with saddles or with a full set of armor," Michael McGee, Special Effects Producer, exposes. "And then the *biggest* challenge was to put people on their backs and then have people riding them in the sky and on the ground and have *real* interaction with them. In this film, we hold on shots for ten seconds, and you can take in layers and layers of dinosaurs."

Now that's epic TV.

JON M GIBSON



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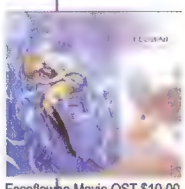
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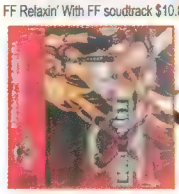
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as told to jon m gibson

MAGIC MUSHROOMS

Mushroomhead's unique look is unlike that of other metal groups —just take one look; they're leather-clad rag rolls

Cleveland, Ohio. Not exactly your typical metal town. But when eight local boys decided to take a break from their other bands and commence a side project, Mushroomhead—in all its twisted, rag doll glory—was born. And Cleveland rejoiced, as it was a union uncommon to the metal scene of, well, anywhere. The band's eclectic styling features samples from ever walk of musical life, from industrial and rap, to jazz and techno. They are like a stage-bound octopus—each tentacle has a mind of its own but they are all connected by one, common thread: the art form. As you can imagine, we had a lot of questions, beginning with their unique brand of leather war masks—so we tapped Skinny, Mushroomhead's longtime drummer, for some relief.

Please tell me your not wearing your mask right now.
[laughs] No, no it doesn't sound that good over the phone.

You don't keep it on in the shower?
No, no. But in bed at home with the wife, we do all kinds of—she's a big fan of the mask at home. So are the kids. They wear 'em and run around like crazy. It's a family affair.

So how did the "concealed identity" thing begin?
When we originally got this thing together, we were all in other bands. Mushroomhead started off as a side project, really. Then once we got it rollin' enough to actually play out with it, we got to thinkin' we should probably do something. The whole costume/mask thing was somethin' a majority of us had always wanted to do anyways. But it was basically to hide the identities of the people in the band from the bands that they were in. So, in the local scene around Cleveland, they didn't have any preconceived notions or automatic stereotyping. We just didn't want anyone pigeon-holing us right off the bat—saying, "Oh, they're going to be this rap/metal thing." At the time, the Nirvana, Pearl Jam and Seattle sound was kinda takin' over. We wanted something very experimental. We basically went out to hide our identities to give the music a chance, instead of going off of this front man and that front man combined to make a "super" group.

What were the initial impressions of your stage act?
When we started we used to get a lot of the Mr. Bungle and GWAR comparisons, because those were the only bands doing somethin' similar. Musically, we're obviously nothing alike. Our whole image and the way we look now, as opposed to the way we looked when we started—it evolved. As we evolved as a band, [our] image evolved with it.

Isn't there conflict with so many members?
Everybody knows, not so much what we want, but we know what we don't want. We're pretty good about it. That's the best thing about this band. A lot a people will take criticism the wrong way—if you shut down their ideas, they'll claim up, and are like, "F—k them, they didn't want to use my ideas." Mushroomhead is very much the opposite. "Oh, you don't like that one. Well, how 'bout this one? How 'bout that idea?" No one takes it to heart because, you know, we're all lookin' for the same focus—to have quality music and keep the song's integrity intact. And not just f—kin' sell out and jump on some bandwagon. We tried to set off and do our own thing.

Now this is something I don't hear every day: The band veered away from signing a major record deal for eight years. Why?
You know, unless it's a *real* record deal, f—k it—it ain't worth it. You wanna just give away all your hard work and, sure, take a chance and sign away with some label? We just never had a good offer—at least in our eyes. There's eight of us. We've done it all, from booking, the managing to producing, mixing, mastering, making t-shirts—the whole nine yards; we kept it all in-house. It really got to the put were we needed help, so we welcomed the deal from Universal at that point. Once again, it was the right deal. We weren't gonna sign on with somebody and just have our career ruined.

So The Man's always out to f—k you?
Right. You gotta watch it, man. We were *real* cautious.

MOON PATROL, PART 1

Kaeti O'Ghara of Moon Theory

"Writing this cerebral has become increasingly hard to find."

Minutes after you pigeonhole Moon Theory as a combination of Berlin and Bjork—loving every second of it—you realize that there is actually much more going on here—much much more. This self-titled debut is a deep excursion into the religion of their music, which is nearly impossible to categorize. Is it trip-hop with shades of prog? Or a more ethereal Garbage? One thing is for sure. Kaeti O'Ghara is destined for greatness. Her vocal range and overall sound is euphoric, instilling empowerment, joy, freedom, or whatever she happens to be preaching, depending on the track—a collection both diverse and profound. Writing this cerebral has become increasingly hard to find. Midway through the CD, prepare yourself for a poignant surprise and bask in Moon theory's creative spirit and verve. For the full experience, check out www.moontheory.net

Whether you have questions, criticisms—or if you just need to vent or say what's on your mind—write us here at **play**. It's time to get a major forum going…off-line. **Email your queries and concerns to:**

letters@play-magazine.com

hardcore at four.

I've been a long time fan of your magazines and feel I know you guys a little bit from reading your stuff for so long. If there is one person who knows just as much or more then you about video-games, its me! I am 39 years old and have been playing for 25 years—Intellivision was my first system. Anyway, I am just turning my 4-year-old son onto *Sonic* on Genesis and Nomad—remember that system?—and he loves it. In the meantime, I'm currently playing: *Halo*, *Rallisport Challenge*, *Max Payne*, *Final Fantasy X*, *Rise of the Dragon* (Sega CD), *Snatcher*, *Road Rash* (3DO), *Silent Hill 2* (Xbox), *Wreckless*, and *Max Steele* (DC). But here's my wish list: a new *Shining Force* (Xbox), a *Road Rash* or *Strike* series game for PS2 or Xbox, *Bionic Commando* for PS2 or Xbox, *Shinobi* (Xbox), *Final Fantasy Tactics* (PS2), and of course, *Halo 2*. Keep up the great work; and bring on the Top 10 list...

Flick
(via e-mail)

It's nice to know we can connect with our readers, since that's what print is really all about. It's always great to hear what you're playing too—you'll notice the Top 10 has finally made it into the format. I must say, that's quite the diverse lineup to be taking on, all at once. How many hours a day can you put in with a 4-year-old in the house? And how big is your entertainment center? The weight of a 3DO, and an Xbox would topple most. I think you need to send us a pic of your setup.... As for your wish list, *Halo 2* is the only game we know of that's in development, although it's a safe bet that EA will continue both the *Road Rash* and *Strike* series. *Shinobi* Xbox—now that would be cause for celebration! It's not impossible—I'm pretty sure we'll at least see the 16-bit collection on GBA eventually. *FF Tactics* would likely go to GameCube sometime after the GBA version. The long shot is *Bionic Commando*. It would be great to see, but something tells me it's not in the cards. Perhaps another *Strider* is in our future. Your 4-year-old sounds like he has it made. It's a good idea starting him out on 16-bit and having him earn his way up. A good 2D backbone is a must for every child prodigy! (DH)

'til dub do us part

Your article on *State of Emergency* was dead on. My wife and I read all the good adult video-game advocates and articles written. My wife is so cool. She watches lots of anime (but it *must* be English subtitled). We couldn't even fathom *Kenshin* dubbed, but *Cowboy Bebop* was one of the best though. If the DVD does not have the option, we get weary. She also *loves* RPGs (*Panzer Dragoon Saga* being her favorite) and is the love of my life. I saw you holding your son in one of your later issues and wondered if your wife is cool with your energetic love for games like mine is. There are people out here that care and don't just buy magazines for pictures. Thanks for your time.

Stephen Oliphant
(via e-mail)

Little Hunter is 18 months now and playing *Pikmin*. In fact, he has a crazy *Pikmin* fixation going. He wigs out over the intro and then steers Captain Olimar around laughing hysterically. It certainly sounds like you've found the right girl, but I think that if my wife was into games and anime, we'd be in huge trouble. What if she hammered me in *VF4*—No! Besides, since I'm consumed with both so much, she's the one running the show; and with our new little gamer, it's quite a production. I, too, despise a lackluster dub, but it seems they are becoming less and less prevalent. Most companies take dubbing pretty seriously, seeing as how they out-sell subs by such a wide margin. I usually check out both just to make sure the English pitch is on the up-and-up, and then settle in with the English. I'm to fixated on the imagery to read subtitles, but I respect those who still prefer them. *BeBop* was a great one. Thanks for the acclaim on the *SoE* piece. I got quite a bit of mail on that one—all good. I think it's vital the mature market thrives to keep this roll going. The video-game industry is one of the healthiest and I'd like to see it stay that way. I'm glad our readers feel the same. The Question now is, can we—and should we—show full-frontal anime nudity and swear like sailors? (DH)

less reading, more boogers.

First off, I just want to say that you guys are doing a great job—you're like the *Maxim* of gaming mags. *Gamers' Republic* was good, but I like this mag better, especially with the anime and TV sections. I loved the interview with the Spumco guys [from the premiere issue of play]! I have one suggestion, though: At the end of each review, could you put a run down of all the +/- points of the game so that I don't have to read the whole thing?

Ed Foster
Troy, Michigan
(via e-mail)

I'm a Michigan local myself, only recently venturing to the west coast. Can't say I miss driving on black ice, though. Anyways, we had quite an "interesting" chat with John K of *Ren and Stimpy* fame in our premiere issue. Odd that he finds his latest creation, *Ripping Friends*, an utter waste of space. But that's exactly what we're dedicated to: bringing you the conversations you won't read anywhere else. As for the +/- checklist, we've actually considered another option. Instead of printing a 116-page mag every month, we're chopping it down considerably to a one-page, black-and-white flyer—just scores, only scores. Does the suit your needs? (JMG)

welcome note.

Oh my gawd, Dave Halverson is back! Why didn't anyone tell me about this?

Regards,
GET_GRIMEY
(via e-mail)

Formal announcements will be sent out next month. Dave sends his regards. (JMG)

personal revisions.

Just writing to say THANK YOU! It's as if you specifically wanted to make a magazine just for me—and on top of that, you throw in cool interviews with the creator of *Samurai Jack* (the best show on Cartoon Network, at this point). I'm in heaven. I'm still gonna keep my subscription to *PSM* and *Animerica*, but as soon as I get the cash you are gonna be comin' to my doorstep monthly.

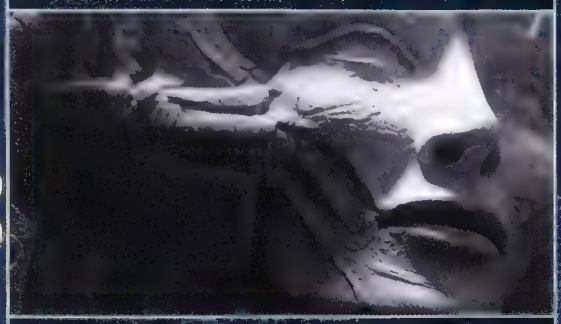
Ed
(via e-mail)

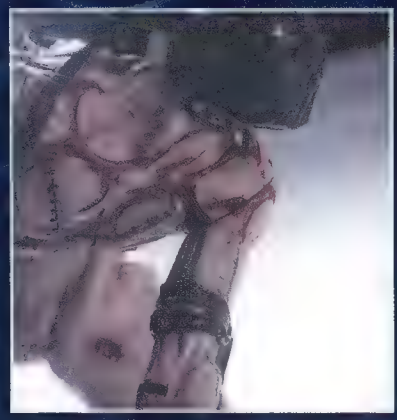
We actually couldn't secure the copyright for *ED* magazine—NBC wasn't too kind to our legal department—so we decided to go with our second choice, play. Fun aside, we're really striving to lock down some amazing "media" coverage—it's the one section that truly sets us apart from all the other video-game books. We comb through piles upon piles of entertainment every month—anime, film, DVD, music, TV, the freshest gear, the coolest action figures—giving coverage to only the most deserving. (JMG)

artificial

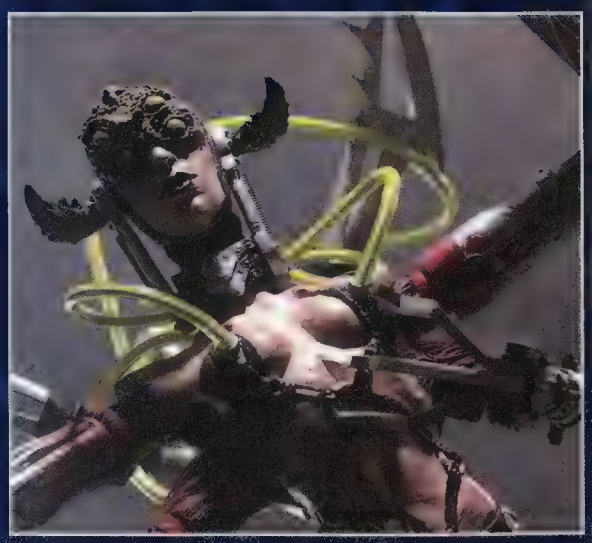
but not intelligent...

hr giger



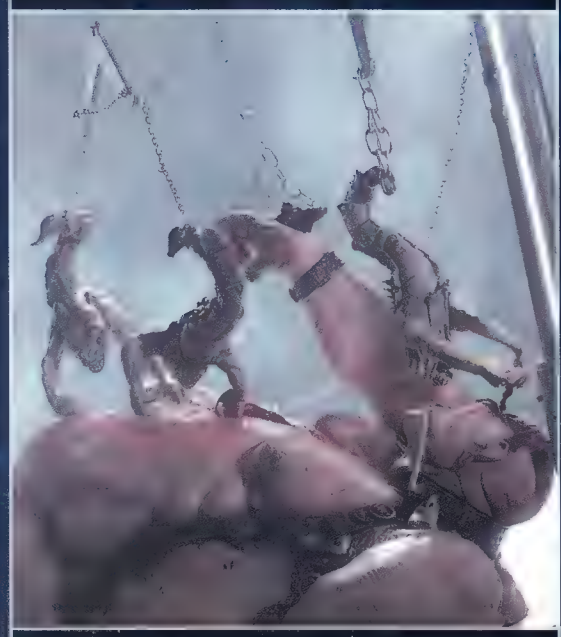


clive barker's tortured souls 2



:: thank todd

What could be better, I ask you, than **H.R. Giger** designs transmogrified into three-dimensional dioramas? Okay, sex with Janet Jackson. But these toys are certainly the next best thing. Pictured below, **Tortured Souls 2** look like what every American would like to do to Osama, so lets support 'em! A joint collaboration between **Clive Barker** and **McFarlane**, these family friendly toys prove once and for all that both of these guys are seriously sick puppies, but in a good way! **Tortured Souls 2** are due to hang, tortured and bleeding, on hooks everywhere **this October**.



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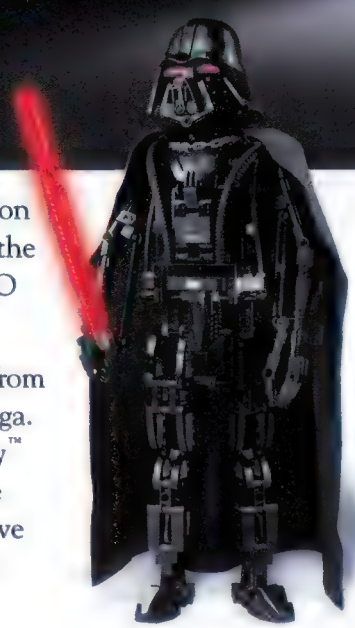

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artificial

but not intelligent...

spawn series 22

movie maniacs 5

:: spawn series 22_movie maniacs 5

Further bliss from camp McFarlane: Todd is now exploring the **Viking Age** with **Berserker**, **The Troll**, **Blue Tooth**, **Dark Raider**, **Skull Splitter Spawn**, **Blood Axe Spawn**, **The Blood Axe**, and **Thunderhoof Valkerie**. If there's any justice, we'll get a game out of this one. Below, with **Movie Maniacs 5**, McFarlane moves beyond the realm of horror into mainstream sci-fi and fantasy with an **18-inch T-800 Endoskeleton** and **Sarah Connor** from—duh—*The Terminator*, **Lord of Darkness** from ***Legend***, **Jason X** from...er...***Jason X***, and the **Tooth Fairy** from God knows what...

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jon m gibson
executive editor

On the rare occasion that he's actually in the office, Jon tends to spend most of his day striking up random conversations with whomever happens to dial in. After moving to the West Coast during E3 2001, he's been ingrained in th[illegible] ment scene ever since.

tricia gray
[illegible]

[illegible] has been a [illegible] anime. After a stint at [illegible] Magazine [illegible] several years of production experience within the gaming industry—and [illegible] coverage of the event wasn't [illegible]

michael hobbs
[illegible]

[illegible] obsessively need to tweak the design of play, our art director has recently trapped himself inside an iMac. Perhaps one [illegible] can keep him busy [illegible] inside with.

nelson lui
associate art director

During the last round of [illegible] time for the issue of play, Nelson managed to keep everyone's spirits soaring by modeling swimsuits, harness photographs and [illegible] of deep-sea [illegible] in the catalog of Make-A-Pretty-Girl. The [illegible] has been [illegible]

tom ham
contributing writer

A regular jet-setter working in the video-game industry—and a celebrity in his own right—Tom's extensive [illegible] of the likes of Fox, The Washington Post and Comedy Central [illegible] integrity at a recent Codemasters' boxing event in Vegas (seen at left).

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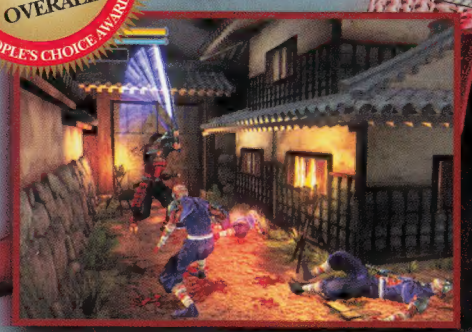

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